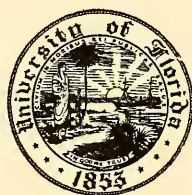



**AMATEUR
THEATER**

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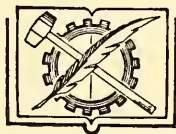
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AMATEUR THEATER

A GUIDE FOR ACTOR AND DIRECTOR

VAN H. CARTMELL



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FOREWORD

This book is designed to be a practical guide for the beginner in the amateur theater. It touches on almost all the aspects of producing a non-professional play except the financial ones. The organization is presupposed. This book deals with the choosing, casting, directing and staging of plays. It is not aimed at making a professional of anyone—only to interest and, possibly, help those for whom the production of plays seems to be a pleasant hobby. It is primarily intended for the ones responsible for putting on the play and, particularly, for the amateur director who finds himself facing a new play with a mixed flock of relatively determined but variably equipped interpreters.

Much of it is based on a similar book first published twenty-five years ago. The principles and problems have not much changed in the interim. The theater-in-the-round has come into greater use and “the method” in acting has received much critical notice, but for all practical purposes, the problems that face the inexperienced remain the same. The writer has simply had twice as much practice as he had had before in working and playing with that generally intelligent and delightful individual—the amateur actor.

V.H.C.

New York, 1961

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Chapter I

THE PLAY AND ITS CASTING

Almost every amateur dramatic group builds its initial enthusiasm around the choice of a play. Unless you have started out with the avowed purpose of producing a specific play or are a body dedicated solely to the works of Shakespeare or Gilbert and Sullivan, you will immediately be faced with the business of selecting the best vehicle for the display of your talents. Your first consideration must be for your audience. Your motive must be either to entertain or to instruct, and in the vast majority of cases, the former is the principal objective. If you are at all serious in your work you will want to entertain by the quality of your play rather than by the novelty of your doing it. You must have something to work with and the measure of your success will be in the skill with which you present your material. As a first principle it may be said that comedies are safest, farces easiest. Drama is difficult and tragedy dangerous. Poetry is disaster in a capsule.

You will be wise to concentrate at first on situation comedies. Even the inept in your cast can carry along the story line and help provide amusement. The comedy of

character relies more on a skilled performance. Farce makes the least demands on the actor but requires a director with an exceptionally good eye and ear and the ability to whip up pace.

Straight drama is the choice of many and there is much to be said for picking a thriller. A really fine play of this sort will hold the interest of your audience and, given an adequate performance, is reasonably assured of success. But it demands illusion. Any breaks in continuity or lapses in performance are doubly damaging. And if any mechanical effect goes wrong, one of the high points of your play is generally wrecked. In a light play, the stuck window or the recalcitrant drawer may be laughed off and forgotten without serious injury to your evening—but in high drama, the unlightable match or the non-existent dagger provide situations from which it is difficult to recover.

Once, in a play in which the writer was involved, a newly smitten corpse tried to take advantage of a brief black-out and left the stage to repair his beard which had become disarranged during the struggle attendant upon his demise. The lights returned while he was still in the wings and the butler who, entering, was supposed to be shocked at discovering the body on the fire-rug, gave the most convincing performance of his life in the matter of appalled surprise. There is not much that can be done in such a situation and it takes a long time to recapture the believing attention of your audience.

At least at first, stick to comedy. In general, too, it is wise to avoid the star-part play. A great deal of work on

the part of frequently twenty or so people—on-stage and off—depends on the artistry of one; this seems an unnecessary risk, even if the esprit de corps is beyond criticism, which unfortunately, it frequently isn't. (It is astonishing how people who profess little interest in acting are, when they succumb to casting, seriously concerned with the importance of their part. It is a happy organization that is made up of those quite as ready to play the camel-driver as the prince.)

Select a play, if possible, with but a single set. Your committee will probably insist upon this for practical and economic purposes, but in any event avoid, if you can, the problem of set-changing delays unless you have an ingenious designer and an experienced, willing and sober set of stage-hands.

Be wary, too, of what may be called symbolic settings—the single set piece signifying locale, the indicated background which frequently overworks the local florist's potted palm, and, in fact, any demand upon the audience's imagination in lieu of scenery. It is very true that on the professional stage extraordinary effects may be attained by what appear to be the simplest of devices, but these results usually stem from genius in selection, the judicious use of a variety of stage levels and, most of all, consummate artistry in the handling of lighting equipment beyond the resources of the average amateur group.

If you have a one-set play, build the set as firmly as possible, decorate it as if it were your own home (supplement what is called for in the script with refinements that will "dress-up" the scene without interfering with the

action), light it brightly and, when the curtain goes up, your actors will have a flying start.

Modern plays are generally best. They avoid costumes and excessive make-up and are in the idiom of the audience. Don't be afraid of the comparatively recent or familiar. Plays are easily forgotten and good ones bear a second seeing. Better be sure of the appeal of your vehicle. And bear in mind that many people who say: "Oh, that old one!" never saw it in their lives.

Well—let us presume you have selected your play. You now have to cast it. Whom have you to depend upon for the leads? What material have you to draw upon for the supporting actors? How many will turn out for the reading down at the Community House on Wednesday night?

Even a cursory glance establishes the fact that the feminine contribution to Thespis outnumbers the male by a ratio of about three to one. That is very gratifying from one standpoint, but Bill Jones seems to be the only experienced actor we have, and if he plays the Sheriff, who is going to play Abner? And the Doctor is an important part, too. Eddie Smith is a pretty good comedian, but he's much too young. Still, we want to cast to full strength—he can wear a gray wig. There's Jim Brown, but we don't want to use him—remember how awful he was as the Innkeeper in the Fall show? Maybe he'll prompt. Well, anyway—let's give out the copies of the play and let them read them aloud. But, we're set on Bill for the Sheriff and Eddie for the Doctor, aren't we?

Now that is about ninety per cent wrong.

Throwing out all consideration of the advisability of getting new faces in your cast for the sake of building up community interest—and of that there is more to be said—it is not always advisable to put your best actor in the best part. Sometimes the strength of the part will carry a less accomplished actor and you will do better to use your talented performer in a less conspicuous role, to which his ability may give added value and help balance your production. Furthermore, the practice of occasionally casting your leading players in minor roles makes it much easier for you to persuade some of your feebler but insistent mummers to accept small parts with a better grace.

In the second place, you're asking a good deal of Eddie Smith (to say nothing of the audience) when you put him in a wig. As a general rule, you will do well to pick someone who naturally looks a part even though you sacrifice something in acting ability. Wigs are dangerous things. Audiences at amateur plays are keen to pick out artificialities. The less make-up the better. Furthermore, if a man looks a part, that very fact lends him a certain authority on the stage. You may find an element of "convincingness" in him that is of more value even than art. Particularly where age is involved, try to cast to type.

And as for making the inept Jim Brown the prompter—we'll have a lot more to say about prompters later.

In principle, however, the most serious criticism to be made of your imaginary council is your making up your

mind about the casting of certain parts in advance. This is an almost universal practice. And, as a result, John Jones has been playing butlers for eleven years and Ethel Smith will continue to portray maiden aunts until she moves to another city. This specialization of roles—usually involuntary on the actor's part—is frequently criticized on the professional stage. It is even less defensible among amateurs. The fact that John and Ethel were so good in their characterizations should imbue in you the belief that they are good actors rather than a good butler and a natural-born aunt.

If you are guilty of preconceived casting it is not only with these individuals that we are concerned, but with the far more important consideration of your group as a whole. There is not one amateur group in ten that does not suffer from the conviction on the part of a large percentage of its members that the casting of plays is all done in advance and that the "tryout" is a pretentious farce.

Such an attitude is contagious and breeds dissatisfaction that often results in heartaches and resignations. It is a vicious circle. The dynasty of active members becomes more and more inbred, the attendance at casting meetings steadily decreases, and about the time that the clique begins to realize the need of new blood it has none to draw on. Those whom an occasional good part would have kept as members are no longer in attendance, even at the performances. And, after all, even amateurs must have audiences!

Some players read excellently and then on the stage lose all their appeal. Others stumble through rehearsals with books in their hands yet perform well behind the footlights. Still others make auditions deceptive by employing a tone in reading very different from that in which they normally speak.

In circumstances in which a director is faced with a group with which he is unfamiliar, he may find it helpful to abandon the actual script for a preliminary tryout of sorts along independent lines. One method that has occasionally proved successful is to manufacture some "ad lib" scenes.

Ask two of the candidates to lift an imaginary heavy box, hang a non-existent picture, or play a game of malletless croquet together. You will then have an excellent opportunity to gauge their powers of visualization, imagination, and sense of timing. Then give them a brief scene to play, making up the dialogue as they go along. Let one try to sell the other a dog, or stage a quarrel, or propose marriage. You will get an idea of their resources, the quality of their voices and their flexibility of expression.

In each instance try to give the candidate a type that is along the line of the character in your proposed play for which he is physically the most fitted. You will often catch a hint of a valuable quality in him that would be submerged in any stereotyped reading of the play in hand.

If such a system is seriously attempted and made something of a game, so that the candidates will lose their self-

consciousness, unsuspected talent will frequently be discovered, even in groups in which the abilities of the members are thought to be pretty well known.

Another consideration of some value in this method of tryout is the fact that it provides entertainment for those not participating and whets their interest in the proceedings. Too often the endless repetition of selected scenes bores and tires the candidates to a point where their restlessness disturbs the performers and dampens the enthusiasm of all concerned.

It seems hardly necessary to note that the appearance and effect of the cast as a whole must be borne in mind when selecting the players. Contrasts in size, coloring and voice are usually desirable. Avoid having all your women blondes or all your men basso-profundos. So much of the effect of a play is received through the eye rather than the ear that a pleasing face and a quick smile are assets that will frequently more than counterbalance a lack of experience. The audience is quick to forgive an occasional lapse in a physically pleasing player.

Unfortunately the converse also holds true—particularly in the case of the feminine roles. With a few rare exceptions even an accomplished actress cannot play leads if she is not reasonably good-looking. The audience simply will not accept an unattractive heroine. A rheumatic Romeo, while hardly desirable, may be winked at, but there is no chance for an unappetizing Juliet!

Granted some little stage presence in each, pick your cast members as close to type as possible. Base this on

appearance and not on past performances. (Our friend who has excelled so at maiden aunts probably would equally look the part of a book agent, school-mistress, farmer's wife, nurse, or a host of other characters.) Set up a personable pair in leads as a bid for your audience's sympathy. Then, having established the fact that the audience will appreciate hearing what the play is all about, and that therefore a distinct delivery is as rubies and fine gold, set to work on the action and the job of building up impressions by an appeal to the eye as well as the ear.

You will find yourself immediately face to face with the problems that beset your players as individuals.

Most nonprofessional actors are pushed into parts with no preliminary training whatever. The average amateur production is in rehearsal for from five to six weeks, generally working three nights a week. These rehearsals, in most instances, average about two hours of real work, allowing for late arrivals, interruptions, and the occasions on which the Williamses have to leave a bit early to give the baby her ten o'clock bottle. Such a schedule permits, at the most, thirty-six hours of rehearsal work for a three-act play. That is enough, perhaps, for experienced players, but it does not allow time for any very intensive instruction in the fundamentals of acting. To accomplish much in the line of a finished production the actors must have some working knowledge of first principles to begin with.

Yet the vast majority of those who volunteer for or are

cajoled into an amateur production never have had much training in the art of character projection.

Unfortunately—unfortunately, that is, from the standpoint of one who loves anything that has to do with the theater—there seems to be a conspiracy to discourage early manifestations of a personal enthusiasm for the stage. The youth who goes in for dramatics is liable to be thought an odd fish; self-consciousness sets in, and finally an apologetic tendency toward dramatic expression perishes under the polite taboo of community conservatism. Many a good actor is lost to the amateur stage through the lack of a sort of social courage.

A few survive. These, most of them, would “just as soon,” but they don’t want to “make fools” of themselves. Of course if it’s for the local charity and Bill Jones is going to be in it, *that helps*. But even after the enrollment, the neophyte is in danger of falling by the wayside. “Tryouts” come, and he discovers for the first time the terrifying sound of his own voice. He is faced with the magnificent problem of sitting down and getting up again naturally. He is stunned and puzzled by the extraordinary fact that, during thirty-odd years, he has not hitherto been conscious of the obvious inconvenience of his hands and feet. He may flee.

He may, on the other hand, stick it out and be one of the little group that assembles for the final casting. The following chapters take up some of the problems that will confront him when he finds himself with a script in his hands.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *You're safest with modern comedy.*
2. *Don't invariably cast the principal roles prior to the tryout.*
3. *Cast as nearly as possible to type, with a minimum of reliance on wigs.*
4. *Find room for a couple of attractive faces, if possible.*

Chapter II

FIRST PRINCIPLES

It is just as well to wait until you have had at least one rehearsal before you start actually to learn the lines of your part. The "business" must be established before you concentrate on your speeches. Then you should familiarize yourself with both at once, so that your actions and your speeches are assimilated simultaneously and each acts as a sort of prompt for the other. They are thus naturally blended. If an actor learns his lines parrot-like prior to knowing what his stage business is to be, he may find it difficult to correlate one with the other, and the result is not good.

To some, learning lines presents little difficulty. For others, it is a tedious business. There are various methods of attack and the individual must find for himself the most effective system. Two suggestions, however, usually prove valuable. The first is to concentrate on what you have to memorize immediately before going to sleep at night. It is surprising how often you find that you have retained the lines in the morning. Presumably your subconscious has worked for you during your sleeping hours.

Whatever the cause, there is no doubt that many are helped by this system of bedtime review and morning recital.

The second system is to take pencil and pad and after you believe you have sufficiently mastered your lines, endeavor to write them out. Those spots in which you are shaky or forgetful will immediately manifest themselves and the very act of correcting them in pencil will help fix them in your memory subsequently.

Of course, it is essential that, in the early process of memorizing, you find someone to "hold the book" for you. If you do not try to recite your lines in the company of a monitor, you may easily fix in your mind a garbled phrase which is hard to get rid of later. The author presumably spent a good deal of time picking the right words for the right place and although one can admire the facility with which certain actors improvise and paraphrase, they are hardly doing justice to the author, and frequently, are jeopardizing the quality of the dialogue. It is true that a glib improvisation is frequently more satisfying to the audience than a halting delivery, but neither need be tolerated.

In studying your part you have three major things to consider: the type of character you are expected to portray, what motivates it, and what its relation is to the other characters in the play. Establish these things in your mind, and when learning your lines learn them "in character." The sooner you memorize your lines the better your performance will be, for then during rehearsals

you will be able to "listen" to what the others are saying and how they say it. The real test of the actor is how well he "listens."

When you have mastered your part to your own satisfaction—that is, when you have achieved a clear conception of its character, have become easy in the lines and have linked them up with such stage movement as is necessary—you have the materials before you with which to paint your picture. You now face the job of determining the method and degree of emphasis best calculated to project your characterization over the footlights to the audience. As aids you have your voice, your facial expression, pose and gesture.

It isn't a bad idea, when studying a part, to run through it once or twice without speaking the lines, and see how far your body, hands and feet are contributing toward your impersonation. The catlike tread of a burglar is obviously as unsuited to the role of a city magistrate as a long white beard is to a head waiter, and while such patent infraction of the laws of probability are unlikely to occur even among the most inept, contradictions of a less glaring nature frequently manifest themselves. It is, in addition, surprising how little thought as a whole is given to the possibilities of contributing to characterization by physical mannerism. If you are supposed to be of a low order of intelligence let your weight manifest itself in your feet: your physical actions should reflect the slowness of your mental reactions. If, on the other hand, yours is an alert role, strive for a springiness in your gait, a decisiveness in your gestures and a certain precision in

all your movements. If you must portray a nervous type, select certain points in your part at which you may show your lack of ease without doing harm to your fellow actors and concentrate on these instants to emphasize your restlessness. A dope fiend is not likely to be the hero of a play, but in the hands of an unskilled actor he is very liable to prove the most conspicuous figure. Avoid constant fidgeting. You can convey a sense of nervous tension by keeping absolutely motionless but showing in your pose and expression that you are making an effort so to do. A rigidity of the limbs and tensing of the muscles will promote the effect you want. Avoid extremes, of course. Remember that when your friend Jim Williams displays dramatic emotion by distending his nostrils, he succeeds only in looking like a rocking horse. Emotional display on the stage is a good deal like cymbals in the orchestra—sometimes necessary—but a little goes a long way. Let your sudden fits of fluttering hands or rapidly shifting eyes be more telling by being less frequent.

Be sparing in all your gestures, but when you make them don't be afraid to make them broad. Half a gesture is worse than none at all. It is better to do the wrong thing strongly rather than the right thing weakly. When you use your hand, don't let your elbow stick to your side. If you do, the effect will be curiously apologetic. If you take a step toward someone, take a full step. When you turn to look at another character, turn all the way and let your turn be manifest in your body as well as your head.

When some movement is definitely interpretive of a

speech, it is generally best to let it slightly precede the speech. Try saying, "Give me that!" and *then* extending the hand, and then reverse the procedure and see how much more effective it is to make the gesture first.

When doing straight pantomime, or when the exigencies of your part require you to convey an idea without speaking—remember not only that your movement must be emphatic but also that the elimination of unnecessary gesticulation is equally important. Give the audience one thing at a time upon which to focus. And bear in mind that one of the chief assets of a good actor is his control of his eyes. In pantomime this is particularly obvious because the audience is concentrating visually, and almost automatically seeks the eye of the actor. It is enormously important in any dramatic projection. If the brain wanders, so does the eye. The eye indicates the direction of the thought and is accordingly a great interpretive aid. And despite the relative sizes of the eye and the hand, the well-controlled eye can be the more effective of the two. Consider the fact that, when an inexperienced player is trying to remember his elusive lines, he is liable to close his eyes. By so doing, he divorces himself from his audience. The eye is an essential means of communication. If it is out of focus, so is the brain. A cooperation between the two is a great aid toward the projection of any idea.

Skillful pantomime resolves itself into a series of well-blended but carefully defined poses. The first rules for pantomime are to *think it* properly, *see it* clearly, and *do it* with precision. If you are going through the mo-

tions accurately of taking a drink, you must see the glass. If *you* don't, the *audience* won't. If you are pretending to fill the glass from a bottle, take your time, watch the liquid running out, and set the bottle down carefully. Don't make a swift gesture; you couldn't with a bottle and a glass in your hands. Be not only deliberate in your movement but be exact as well. In other words, set the bottle down on the same level from which you picked it up, and when you pick it up again, pick it up from the exact spot at which you set it down.

If you really *see* the things you are supposed to be using, this will be easy. If you don't, it will be nearly impossible. Everybody has seen the clown in the circus who plays his imaginary game of baseball. If he did not go back always to the same spot to pick up his bat, or if he failed to look each time in exactly the same direction when he faced the pitcher, the act would lose all its effectiveness. The pantomimist gradually builds up an entire scene for his audience; if he begins confusing the exact location of his invisible properties, the action becomes blurred. He doesn't see the scene and neither does his audience.

In pantomime you can exaggerate—in fact, you must—but, unless you are definitely aiming at comedy or burlesque, avoid being ostentatious. There is a distinction between being broad and being elaborate.

The secret of effectiveness in pantomime lies not so much in the movement expressing a thought as in the pause or high point *within* the movement. Pantomime is not told by *movement*—it is told by poses and gestures

held long enough to become dramatically important. That is the key to success in this art.

In some ways, pantomime is the epitome of acting. The principles that apply to the governing of the body, gesture, etc., in all acting, are doubly important when the aid of the voice is absent and the story may be told by movement only and to the eye alone. Remember always to let your thought precede your action. Take your time. Visualize clearly what you are doing. Be exact in your movements. Crystallize the thought of the action by an instant's pause at its high point. Let your gestures be economical in number but broad in outline, emphatic but not extreme. When you are not contributing directly to the progress of the plot, stay still. But most of all, first, last and all the time—*think* what you are doing and *see* what you are doing it with!

Whatever your role is and whatever the type of the play, it is not a bad idea to start your portrayal before you make your entrance. This does not mean striding about giving preliminary vent to your approaching speeches in a rapid rehearsal in undertone. That practice is frequently damaging to your effectiveness on stage, and in the wings it does not tend to improve your always hazardous relationship with the stage-hands. Last-minute reviews of your lines rarely help. Your speeches are not like telephone numbers that you are trying to retain simply from the book to the transmitter; you are not just carrying them from backstage to the footlights to empty into the audience with a sigh of relief. If you

keep repeating them to yourself just before your entrance, some of the monotony of that repetition will creep into their ultimate delivery.

By starting your portrayal is meant rather the process of assuming the identity of your character prior to your appearance. Don't go over what you are about to say as Sir Charles in the library. See not the reverse side of some canvas flats but rather the panelled walls of a hallway through which you are presumably walking. If you are about to enter a room full of people, think who is going to be there, what your relationships with them are, whether you are anxious or not to see them, if they bore you, fascinate you or anger you. If the plot of the play indicates the type of scene you have just left behind you when you appear, so much the better; visualize that scene so that when you make your entrance you really, in your own mind, will have come from it. This may all seem somewhat far-fetched at first, but it has proved a very useful device to make the inexperienced actor both more comfortable and more convincing when he appears before his audience.

By the same token it is advisable to carry your characterization off the stage with you. Do not drop your role instantly as you pass from sight. A certain amount of "follow-through" is essential. This need not entail oppressive histrionics for a half hour after each performance, but a little carry-over into the wings is sound practice. During performances silence off stage is essential not only for obvious reasons but also for the purpose of

permitting the actor to preserve his stage identity with a minimum of distraction between scenes.

It cannot be overemphasized that if the actor is *thinking* correctly in character a great many otherwise troublesome problems in carriage, expression and tone will take care of themselves. Mrs. Williams may have to give baby that ten o'clock bottle, but thinking about it earlier in the evening will not help her impersonation of Lady Macbeth. She will do better if she is conjuring up mental pictures of blood rather than of milk.

"Thinking in character" involves another thing—and one of the most important for the actor to remember—the valuable art of "listening." Valuable both to you and to your fellow worker, for it contributes to his effectiveness as well as crystalizes your own characterization. When you are being addressed on the stage give heed to the meaning of the speeches you hear, really listen to them and let your appreciation of their significance manifest itself in your expression. Your face will play a sort of obbligato to the major movement of his lines.

This is only fair to your associate. If Polonius is giving you a bit of advice or Lady Jane is telling you her life story, remember this presumably is the first time you have heard it and if *you* are not interested, it is a dead certainty that the audience won't be either! On the other hand, your obvious enthusiasm is partly contagious to them and will add to their appreciation of your fellow actor. It might be said that they will often take him at *your* face value! An extreme example of the audience accepting an emotion second-hand is best illustrated in the building

up of events that take place off stage. Recall the scenes of horse races in plays, or an airplane crack-up, and remember how the vivid excitement of the crowd communicates itself to the audience. Such scenes involve rather more than the simple business of listening on the part of the actor, but the principle is the same. The audience is always in a sense participant in the play and it is very ready to follow the lead of the people on the stage. An exaggerated instance of this is to be found in the duties of the interlocutor in an old-fashioned minstrel show. His laugh is a definite "come-on" to encourage that of the audience. He, of course, lays on the art of listening with a trowel, but it is a refinement of his technique that, in straight drama, keeps many a dull scene alive. Your own performance, moreover, is inevitably enhanced by your ability to listen. Your replies will come out in a more truly responsive tone, the important matter of stress will take care of itself, and what is all too often simply a succession of speeches will suddenly become a scene.

There are few things more damaging to illusion than that expectant look that the amateur actor assumes when he is listening simply for his cue. To do that is a fatal practice. The alert but aloof expression that the actor inevitably acquires when he is tensely waiting for the little string of words that is to release his next speech is always obvious and artificial.

There is, however, such a thing as listening too energetically. This results in the dreadful manifestation of facial acrobatics known as "mugging." It is an inheri-

tance from the old-school actor who felt that he must display his wares by sheer force. He put on his emotions in much the same manner as his make-up, externally applied with plenty of artificial aid. His face altered its contours with amazing speed as he "registered" reactions with the abrupt shifts of a magic lantern. He could not listen to a tale of woe without shaking his head, pursing his lips and emitting a series of "tchk, tchks," and when he was angry, if his eyes did not flash fire it was not because he failed to try to strike a spark with his eyebrows. With the bad lights and poor acoustics of old-fashioned stages, exaggeration of expression and voice may have had some justification, but only occasionally—and only for broad comedy purposes—is it legitimate to "mug" today.

As a matter of fact, in one type of slapstick humor the absolute antithesis of "mugging" is in more general favor. The "stooge" has been developed into an important actor type. He is a comedian's helper and line feeder, characterized generally by a complete absence of facial expression. He plays "dead pan," or blank face. This is an effective method of pointing a certain type of comedy, but it is a highly specialized field; the average amateur is only too liable to be "dead pan" without meaning to be so. And, further, bear in mind that even the "dead pan" artist has a focus and his very lack of expression must be directed, to be effective. Although the blank face may be intended to portray a blank mind, if there *is* a blank mind behind it, the effect will not be achieved.

In the matter of expression, as in so many other phases

of the actor's job, we come back again to the necessity of "thinking in character." It is a reasonably safe bet that any manipulation of the features that does not emanate naturally from a thought in the mind of the player will resolve itself simply into a process of "making faces," which ceases to be a criterion of acting upon graduation from the nursery.

A happy medium may be struck between the overdone reaction and the "dead-pan" technique. Not only, as has been pointed out, is it wise to listen to the speech of your fellow actor, but it is obviously helpful to him to react, in a properly controlled fashion, to what he is saying. There is, however, a dangerous pitfall in this into which many an amateur inadvertently tumbles. This is "anticipating" your colleague's line. All too frequently Mrs. Jones is patently amazed and horrified at the news of Aunt Jane's death about two and a half seconds prior to the doctor's announcement of the same. It is sometimes permissible to don an anticipatory smirk at a joke that has not reached its point, but it is a highly damaging practice to carry this principle into other fields on the stage. The gentleman who gives a start before the door bangs, the lady who goes over to answer the phone before it rings, and the ingenue who registers complete surprise at a remark before it reaches the ears of the audience are all in the same class.

Although it is digressing somewhat from the subject at hand, it is perhaps permissible to call attention here to the matter of physical anticipation as well as facial. Just as one should not "point" a chair upon which one

is about to sit, one should avoid any movement calculated to give away a subsequent action. In other words, don't loosen the sword in your scabbard several speeches before drawing it nor take a couple of furtive looks at the window through which you are about to make a precipitous exit prior to your doing so, unless the plot calls for and is advanced by your so doing.

As a matter of fact, one of the best broad rules for stage behavior is to keep still. Not only will this be a help to your associates and a relief to the audience but it will serve to emphasize such movements as you do make when you do make them.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *Learn your lines and your stage business together.*
2. *Keep your physical movements in character.*
3. *Half a gesture is worse than none.*
4. *The gesture should generally precede the speech it emphasizes.*
5. *In pantomime, think it intelligently, see it clearly, and do it accurately.*
6. *Effectiveness in pantomime lies not in the movement so much as in the pause or high point within the movement.*
7. *Think in character before making your entrance—and after.*
8. *Listen to the whole speech, not just for your cue.*
9. *Don't "mug."*
10. *Don't anticipate speeches or actions.*

Chapter III

THE BUSINESS OF PROJECTION

A good voice is, of course, a tremendous asset to the actor. But even the most vibrant, thrilling and melodious vocal chords must get some co-operation from the user. Tone is fine—but articulation is finer.

When, in the middle of a boisterous laugh from the front rows, the people in the balcony are asking each other, "What did he say?" the fault is the actor's. The man who paid a dollar for his seat in Row T is entitled to his money back—and the refund ought to come from the actor rather than from the box office. Given a reasonably coherent speech and the kind of direction that doesn't permit Mabel to run the sewing machine while Auntie is speaking, Auntie ought to be able to make herself understood all over the theater.

This does not involve that sort of labored diction that makes two syllables blossom where only one grew before. One can sound final consonants without saying "Mee-tuh" and "Stop-puh!" Clarity of speech is not the product of elaborate mouthing but simply the result of a little care in bringing it forth. It *is* important to remember the final consonants in words, but it is equally so to remember the other ones. The difference between saying

"Don't you?" and "Dontcha?" lies in giving thought to the "y" just as much as to the "t."

Perhaps the most common, and probably the best, advice for the beginner is to remember to speak in the front part of the mouth and make full use of "tongue, lips and teeth." If you try saying these very words, first exaggerating and then almost eliminating the use of the features named, you will readily see the part they play in the difference between the guttural and the distinct.

In the actual projection of your speeches, the most important thing to remember is to vary the rhythm and tone of your delivery. Soldiers crossing a bridge break step. Otherwise the rhythm of their march starts vibrations that might wreck the bridge. The same principle applies to the theater. An even tempo in one key starts vibrations that create a sort of hum in the ears of the audience which reduces audibility. Vary your tone and find places in your speech to pause for an instant and let the echoes die away. The soporific effect of some sermons is due quite as much to the regular beat and surge of the minister's voice as to any lack of inspiration in his discourse.

One of the greatest differences between a professional and an amateur on the stage is the tendency of the amateur to render his lines all in a string of words. This is simply because he is not *thinking* his speeches. A new thought, or a new variation of thought *must pass through the brain* before being transmitted. Unless the speech is obviously an automatic and unthinking response, at least

a fractional pause for the brain to function is necessary to give it color and meaning. This does not mean that, as a rule, cues need not be quickly picked up. It simply means that the brain must play a part in the rendition of lines and this inevitably involves a change of pace. Metronomic delivery is the greatest pitfall of the amateur. He must learn to combine the happy gift of glibness with the discipline of thought.

As in other phases of acting, there is in the matter of speech too, a tendency due to an effort at "naturalness," to be slovenly. Even if the most casual reading of a line is sought, the question of voice projection cannot be ignored.

Walter Kerr, writing recently in the *New York Herald Tribune* on the subject of "The Pale Inflection," made some illuminating comments on this subject.

"There is something seriously disconcerting in listening to an actor talk, in effect, to himself. The difference between a tone that can be heard and a tone that is specifically theatrical is hard to explain. It is a little like the unaccomplished man at a party who has finally thought of something to say, who isn't very sure that his remark is going to get over, and who thereupon offers it in such a protectively offhand manner and with so little emphasis that one feels embarrassed to have heard him speak at all. You see that he's trying, dear fellow, and you may even notice he has something on his mind. But if he's going to interrupt he's got to interrupt assertively, instead of cresting this lull with his pale and deferential inflection. . . .

"The Theater is a shaped experience rather than a chance encounter; . . . the audience understands the difference between eavesdropping and being spoken to. . . .

"An unmistakably casual tone, . . . is also something of a disrespectful one; it seems to hint that we weren't invited, or perhaps that we came to call on just the wrong night, when everyone was flustered and busy."

Although "the pale inflection" is to be avoided at all times, there is also the danger of too much volume. Emphasis is best obtained not by exceptional stress on the important word but by a slight pause before it. No sound captures the attention of the audience so effectively as no sound. A sudden interval of silence, even though for only part of an instant, is more arresting than an increased voice volume. If you have a vital word in a speech which you are particularly anxious to stress, lead straight up to the very word before hesitating; don't let the break come a word or two before it. The pause to be effective must be an unnatural one. Suppose your speech is, "If she were to see him, I'd die!" and the important thought is that you'd *die*, if you pause before "I'd," instead of going straight to the important word, you are pausing at a normal point, indicated by a comma, but the emphasis is not nearly so clear as if you stopped *after* "I'd." The sentence must be obviously interrupted and left in mid-air to cause your audience to prick its collective ears for the next word. Incidentally, take your suggested speech and try putting the pause in various places and see how many different ideas can be con-

veyed. The speech has at least four different interpretations, and once you are sure of the author's intention, it is definitely up to you to clarify the speech for the audience by effective emphasis. Pauses after the words "if," "to," "see" and "I'd" have very different implications, as each throws the stress upon a different element of the thought.

Pausing can, of course, be overdone. Practised with too great regularity it can achieve a rhythm of its own as tiresome as a steady monotone and even more annoying to the audience. Only experience can teach the proper handling of the pause, but it is a vital part of that sense of "timing" which is the good actor's most valuable possession.

In connection with the general subject of voice projection, it is advisable when you "sit down" to "sit up." There is something about the rigid spine that naturally aids clarity of diction. Of course, this is easier to do if you are playing the tin woodman rather than the scarecrow. It isn't advisable to ruin your characterization in an effort to be heard, but in general it is a sound idea to keep the body fairly erect when speaking.

There is a growing tendency in stage direction, in a striving toward realism, more or less to disregard the fundamental principle of partially facing the audience when you speak. It is perfectly true that good effects can be obtained by turning your back to the footlights, but it goes without saying that overindulgence in this procedure would be most disconcerting to your auditors. If the exigencies of the situation or the whim of your director demands your speaking upstage, extreme clarity

of diction is essential. As a general rule, however, it is advisable to be at least in profile to the audience.

Facing it directly, on the other hand, is liable to be extremely artificial unless you are delivering a monologue and, in the very nature of things, speaking straight to them. In a regular play the only legitimate times an actor may look out over the audience is during a thoughtful or abnormally long speech that calls for a certain variety in its delivery. In such instances it is advisable to focus the eyes obliquely on a point midway between the orchestra and the first balcony, unless the speech is of a character that naturally calls for downcast eyes, in which case you would look at the stage short of the apron. There is a blank space in the average auditorium directly between the orchestra and the balcony that is usually sufficiently bare and motionless not to distract the attention or mind of the actor. Just as in moving pictures the fundamental direction to the novice is never to look directly into the camera, the actor should avoid focusing on any individual member of the audience or even looking directly forward midway between orchestra and balcony. Inasmuch as it is advisable to find a certain amount of repose in any attitude which you adopt, and your gaze cannot be constantly shifting during a speech, it is obvious that some inanimate object is the most desirable spot for your off-stage attention. Even though the spotlights blind you sufficiently so that you are unable to distinguish the point upon which your eyes are fixed, it is still safer to choose a level at which even your blind gaze will not encounter the direct return of that of any individual in the theater.

The safest thing to do is to keep it pretty well to the left or right of the auditorium. Otherwise, even if you are not really looking straight at anyone you may, to others, give the appearance of doing so. Your detachment from the audience must always be preserved.

The old tenet of the stage that one should not speak while moving is not necessarily a sound one. If every actor remained immobile while talking, the result would be extremely stilted, and the idea of striking an attitude before delivering a speech has long been outmoded. It is important that *the other actors* on the stage not shift about unduly during a speech of yours if it has any importance or significance to the plot. And, by the same token, if you wish to attach any emphasis upon what you are saying, it is highly advisable that no pronounced movement accompany it. In neither case, however, is it necessary for you and your associates to adopt fixed poses as though suddenly turned to stone.

Just as in the actual delivery of your speech a pause before an important word accents it, so does the sudden termination of a physical movement of your body tend to focus the audience's attention upon what you next say. Arrested movement, in other words, is as emphatic as arrested speech. It is fundamental that you must surprise your audience in order to gain its best attention. If you stop in the middle of a speech when it is prepared for you to go to the end, they will prick up their ears. If you stop in the middle of a movement which has a preconceived conclusion, this will focus their eyes. There are many obvious tricks of the stage to accomplish this effect.

Elemental instances may serve to illustrate the point. When an actor reaches for a cigarette and arrests his hand in midair, everyone is immediately alert to discover the cause. If he starts for the door and stops two steps before reaching it, the next word he says or the next thing he does will be certain to "register."

This reiteration of the value of the pause, both physical and oral, may seem excessive laboring of a point, but it is really part of the most important factor in acting—namely, a sense of timing. It is safe to say that over fifty percent of stage effect, whether the objective is comedy or tragedy, is attained by a true sense of timing.

The dramatic reply to the crucial question in a melodrama must be held up long enough to capture the audience's attention and increase the tension of its excitement without delaying it so long that it becomes conscious of an artificial pause. Tension can be stretched to the very breaking point, but if the actor presumes too much upon the anxiety of his audience, the strain of its interest begins to diminish and he loses much of the effectiveness that he has hoped to gain. A sudden silence first attracts the attention of the audience and then excites its curiosity—but in another instant it will cease to wonder what Hamlet is going to say and become intrigued with the pleasing possibility that Cousin Arthur has perhaps forgotten his lines. The graph of the audience's attention has an even steeper fall than climb. The really great actor can always catch the mounting enthusiasm of his audience for his speech at its precise zenith. Overstaying the market, however, is a perilous business.

Timing enters into much more than the mere delivering of speeches on the stage. Everything must be timed. Even minor movements must all fit in with the tempo of the action. Obviously action in farce is rapid; in tragedy, slow; but there is a vast difference between the various types of drama that range between, in which some scenes must be played swiftly, others with deliberation. As a general rule, action is speeded up as a climax approaches. The pace is almost invariably increased as an act nears its end. This is called "playing to the curtain" and is calculated to stimulate any available applause when the curtain falls. Speed in acting is not so much a question of delivering lines with the quick spatter of a machine gun as it is a business of picking up cues. The tempo of a scene is based almost altogether upon the intervals between speeches.

Of course, if there is brisk action going on, the tempo of your play does not suffer by an hiatus between speeches, but in the long run, the real speed of a scene depends almost altogether on the actor's ability to cut in with his speech immediately on cue. This gives a sense of animation on the part of the speakers and even uninspired dialogue will not bore if the actors are brisk and the audience forced to be alert. Particularly in farce, the principle of "not giving the audience time enough to think" is pretty generally in the author's mind.

In theatrical parlance, an actor is sometimes asked to "lift it a bit," which simply means that he should increase the tempo and, possibly, pitch of his speeches. An obvious quickening of the pulse of the actor communicates itself

to the audience which has a natural tendency to participate in a well-played scene.

Off-stage noises, such as a knock on the door, must also be carefully timed. They should seem to give the audience a preliminary idea of the entering character or contribute forcibly to the scene which is being enacted upon the stage. A knock on the door can convey various things. It can, for example, be a friendly knock, an ominous knock, a timid knock, or the knock of the law. Each is very different, and, inasmuch as the tone of knocking on wood remains practically the same, the different effects must be achieved almost altogether by timing. A normal knock of an ordinary visitor would be simply "one-two-three," repeated, if necessary, after a pause, in exactly the same fashion. If the knock is to be ominous, it must be a slow "one-two" and, after a pause, repeated in identically the same timing and perhaps even for a third time, after a similar pause. Insistent and excited knocking, on the other hand, must achieve a crescendo by increasing the number of raps and decreasing the interval between them. In other words, they will go "one-two," pause, "one-two-three," a shorter pause and "one-two-three-four."

In the case of door bells, the tone, as well as the timing, must be borne in mind. It goes without saying that a high pitch is appropriate to comedy and excitement and a low pitch to drama and tension. The character of the sound may not contribute greatly to the scene on stage, but at least avoid incongruity.

Another phase of the same general subject is involved

in the matter of "timing laughs." Many an amusing scene is ruined by the actors talking through laughs. In an anxiety to keep up the tempo of a scene and having been thoroughly drilled in the importance of picking up cues, the inexperienced performer is liable to begin his speech immediately after a laugh-provoking line of his associate. After this happens several times the audience becomes afraid to laugh for fear it will miss some important part of the dialogue.

On the other hand, it is unwise to let a laugh die out completely. A fading-out laugh has a depressive effect that definitely tends to drop the scene, and, furthermore, the audience subconsciously will get the idea that too much is expected of it.

Laughter is in effect one form of applause and a sense of timing is equally necessary when an actor "gets a hand." The hand must not die out completely nor be interrupted too soon. Applause during a play usually comes on entrances or exits; the latter being the more desirable, as that is a reward of immediate merit rather than a recognition of past performances. Although a hand is an honor eagerly sought, it should be observed that those who do not get it should not necessarily feel themselves slighted, nor should the recipient of such recognition always be too inflated. A hand is frequently the result of a sure-fire climax which even the worst ham could not bungle. It is worth noting, moreover, that an actor, no matter how good a job he has done, will not get a hand if the attention of the audience is not focused upon him on his departure. Likewise is it true that the tenseness

of certain scenes does not permit of the interruption of applause, however brilliantly they have been acted.

Much could be written on the psychology of applause in the theater. An experienced actor can nearly always estimate his chances of getting a hand on any given exit. Sometimes the star part is so written that there is no point in the play where it is at all likely that he will receive personal applause. On the other hand, the closing of a door upon some minor character may be the signal for clapping night after night. Audiences are amazingly consistent in this respect.

In any case, an excellent feel for timing is necessary at all times to enable the actor to pick up a scene and keep it in motion without cutting in on the comfort of the audience's natural reactions. He must catch his laugh just on the wane—and, a thing that authors should bear in mind, he must not try to pile another laugh on top of the first. If a speech has two possible points in it, choose the better and concentrate on that. Even the most alert audience is less quick than an individual, and it simply cannot assimilate ideas as rapidly. Bear in mind that an intended joke that fails to get across is worse than none, and let your audience get its breath before you try to make it laugh again.

And, speaking of breath, it may be worthy of note here that a useful adjunct toward characterization, both for the actual effect it conveys and for the influence it has upon the individual actor himself, is his method of breathing. A man just coming out of a race must necessarily be breathing rapidly, a man just coming out of a

trance must be breathing slowly. Between these two extremes lies a multitude of emotions, the effect of which might be heightened or diminished by the respiratory scheme of the actor. Although loud sighs and audible gasps are methods of conveying to the audience a state of mind, less noticeable practices in this respect are invariably helpful to the creation of a mood in the actor himself. It is very difficult to breathe rapidly without creating in one's own mind a sense of excitement. The physical action of taking quiet, long, deep breaths promotes a certain steadiness in the brain. The impression of repressed excitement may sometimes be conveyed by a sudden intake of breath. This may not be either heard, seen or sensed by the audience, but it will generally help create in the actor's own mind a proper feeling for the part.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the actor relying upon such artificial means of building up within himself the proper feeling for the part for which he is cast, can hardly expect to achieve true genius by such means.

Laughter and tears on the stage are tricky things. They can be artificially done and prove effective, but the feeling must be within. It is almost as difficult to give an actor instructions in the art of laughing convincingly as it would be to teach the physical act to some unfortunate individual of an alien race to whom the emotion was completely unknown. There are various kinds of laughter and for stage purposes they must be wholly differentiated. There is the hearty laugh, the polite laugh, the sneering

laugh, the raucous guffaw, and the titter of the insane. Each calls for a different type of projection, but in every case proper conception of the character is fundamental. As a brief rule, it might be noted that the hearty and sincere laugh that is guaranteed to be contagious should go up the scale in tone and in volume. The false laugh, or sneering type, should diminish in scale and in volume. The laugh of courtesy, which conveys a certain amount of insincerity without being insulting, usually keeps on a fairly even tone level. The chief thing to remember about a laugh, if it is supposed to encourage the audience to join in, and particularly if it entails a group of players, is that it must grow in volume. If one character is telling an amusing story on the stage, those listening to it should gradually go from smiles to chuckles to guffaws if they wish to "build" the laugh for the comedian. Just as it is almost impossible to look at the picture of someone yawning without doing the same, so it is very hard for an audience to listen to a group of people giving audible and increasing appreciation of a speech without joining in.

Tears, on the other hand, should be silent. An obvious effort to control emotion upon the stage elicits more sympathy from the audience than any active demonstration of grief. A well-known actress upon being asked the secret of her effectiveness in scenes of pathos said she depended almost entirely upon "the heave and the sniff." She was, of course, not doing herself justice, as it required real talent to enlist the sympathy of her audience to the point of being susceptible to the mechanics of her

tears, but the fact remains that "the heave and the sniff" is a far safer method of indicating the tearful than the more audible and athletic efforts that are often found upon the amateur stage. Except in juvenile portrayal, noisy tears are invariably unbelievable. The handkerchief in the hand, the occasional dab at the eyes, a few jerky breaths, and a broken tone in speaking will in nine cases out of ten prove all that is necessary to convey the desired impression.

To create the proper intensity and promote a feeling of sincerity in a truly dramatic scene, absence of facial and bodily gyration is almost essential. Again tonal quality of the voice and a sense of timing will serve. If the actor really "thinks" his part, his external appearance will generally take care of itself.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *Speak from the front of the mouth and let the audience hear you.*
2. *A pause before a word emphasizes it more than added volume.*
3. *Speed is a question of picking up cues rather than talking fast.*
4. *Don't talk through laughs, but don't let laughs die completely before speaking.*
5. *Avoid noisy tears.*
6. *Emotion is mental and is better portrayed by physical repression than by bodily gyration.*

Chapter IV

MOVEMENT AND ITS CONTROL

The chief impression that assails the average male at his first rehearsal is that his hands are hams and his shoes are full of feet. He becomes acutely body-conscious and finds his limbal extremities four distinct problems.

If he is not very careful he will catch himself doing strange things in poses. His trouser pockets he discovers to be the blessed invention of an inspired tailor, and his hands dive like rabbits for this sanctuary. All too often both take permanent residence there—or worse, in the side pockets of the coat, resulting in a pose permissible only for a gunman concealing a revolver, or a newly rich in his first yachting cap.

Feet seem disproportionately large and, as a means of locomotion, are obviously inadequate and independable. In spite of this, however, they develop a distressing tendency to shift about, as though they were surreptitiously trying to steal a little waltzing practice while their owner wasn't looking.

Plainly it is no mean accomplishment to stand simply and still. The cause of this may be an unconscious feeling that because one is on the stage one should be

doing something. The young actor feels that in the very nature of things he must "act." There is a nice distinction in the thought that instead of trying to act a character he must try to *be* it. True impersonation begins in the brain and works out. You frequently hear an actor talk about "getting into" his part; he would do better if he let his part get into him! If the characterization is driving from the inside, the hands and the feet will take care of themselves naturally and effectively.

Such is the ultimate objective, but there are, nevertheless, some practical devices that may legitimately be employed by the beginner to rid himself of some of his early discomfort on the stage. First, if possible, he must be disabused of the idea that he looks like a soldier or a second-man if he stands with his feet together and his hands simply hanging at his sides. It is a natural pose, intended by God, and very generally practiced by man.

Beware of pockets. Those of the coat are not a natural receptacle for hands, and the use of trouser pockets tends to give an impression of artificial ease. Unless you definitely mean to slouch or create an illusion of sophomoric futility—avoid them.

Something in the hands is always a help. The cigarette, of course, is the most obvious aid. It is not distracting to the audience because it is virtually unseen by them. G. K. Chesterton once wrote a detective story called "The Invisible Man," in which the murderer was a letter carrier. Various witnesses testified in good faith that they had observed no one approach the scene of the crime. All had seen the postman, but he was so taken for granted

that he didn't register at all as an individual. How often have we said: "No one came up in the elevator with me" when we have had the company of a uniformed operator. The same psychology applies here. The cigarette between the fingers is such an expected sight that no one sees it. It has, however, its disadvantages. A nervous actor occasionally finds himself subject to a good deal of inaccuracy in lighting it, and may even make the fatal mistake of abandoning the attempt once begun. Or little Miss Whipple who was supposed to look after the properties may have neglected to have set out the ash trays for Act II, with the result that Sir Arthur is forced to roam about on a fruitless quest, nosing hither and yon for a repository for the cigarette he is not only ready but eager to discard. The time of lighting and extinguishing the cigarette must be carefully prescribed and kept to, or a definite hiatus in the action may result. As a rule, however, smoking tends to contribute toward naturalness and aids the repose of the actor. If, on the other hand, the directions call for smoking on the part of a performer who does not normally indulge in the practice, change the business. In front of the footlights is no place for the airy motions of the non-inhaling experimentalist.

Other hand-props are a little less safe than the cigarette. There is always danger of diverting the attention of your audience. A fan, gloves, a stick, a handbag, or a newspaper may be right and helpful if you are content to let them serve merely the purpose of anchor for the hands. As soon as you begin to move them about, however, they merely emphasize your gestures, and while they often are

invaluable aids in pointing a speech they must be used sparingly and intelligently.

If you have occasion to stand near a piece of furniture, let a nervous hand rest upon it. The back of a chair or a table top simply touched by two fingers may frequently give you the confidence you need to preserve poise.

The carriage of your hands may do much to indicate character; if they are not carefully contributing toward your portrayal, at least don't let your pose contradict your impersonation. Folded arms suggest the magisterial or the resigned; hands clasped behind the back, the clerical—in front, the demure; hands on the hips give a somewhat jaunty air if the feet are kept wide apart, but with the heels together the pose is unnatural and slightly effeminate. Thumbs hooked in the suspenders or waistcoat are distinctly bucolic or cheap politician. As a general rule, if you are playing a straight part and have no definite business with which to employ your hands, it is best to let them hang simply at your sides.

Women have less to worry about than have men, in the matter of hands. They more frequently are carrying something, they are less on their feet, and as a rule gesture is more natural to them and less liable to be forced. They are, moreover, generally more graceful than men, and their pose on the stage, though it may be untutored, is rarely strained.

The first rule for the feet is the simplest and at the same time, for some, the most difficult: keep them still. Don't move them until you have some place to go; then go there and stop. Restless feet are disconcerting to the

player and distracting to the audience. If your part calls for a movement across the stage, make it in character—but definitely. If the direction is good, all crosses will be motivated, but even if your object is simply to “dress stage,” don’t let your movement appear vague or blurred, don’t sidestep and don’t back up. If you must alter your position for the benefit of another actor, try to find some logical reason for doing so, and then make your move real, accompanied by a look or gesture that may help to explain it.

Entrances depend pretty largely on your character and the situation, and there are no general rules to be laid down except that it is well to avoid the “star” routine. Occasionally a script calls for a dramatic entrance in which an attitude must be struck and held for the sake of its impact upon the audience. Be very sure, however, that the author intends this to be so. The old-fashioned business of “making an entrance,” in which the actor steps well into the scene, stops, and poses for the benefit of his clientele, is one that may well be avoided. If you are the most important or the best actor in the play the audience will discover the fact before the final curtain; don’t hurl the information at them before they’ve heard you speak.

In making an exit it is advisable to hold part of your final speech until you reach the door. There are two reasons for this; first, that it lends emphasis to your speech, and second, that it is liable to drop the scene if you do not, for the other actors will not wish to speak while you are moving across stage and, perhaps, opening

and shutting a door; such pauses perceptibly slow down the speed of your show. There is no need to be obvious about this. It is better to say, "Good-bye, I am"—one, two, three, four steps to the door—"off to London"—exit, than to reel off "Good-bye, I am off to London"—and then clump, clump, clump, clump across the stage and out; but there is no reason why you cannot say the first part of your exit speech as you move and so time it that you have the last word or two left for the actual exit. As stated earlier, the old tenet of the stage that an actor should not move during a speech is not always valid. If he has a reason to move let him do so. It is better that he not be in motion while he is saying something particularly important to the plot, but otherwise it is altogether admissible for him to make a natural movement as he talks. The important thing is that he should not move *while somebody else is speaking*.

Immobility is one of the first things to be learned. A minor character with St. Vitus's dance automatically becomes the most prominent performer on the stage. No one would look at Hamlet if the gravedigger kept plying his shovel. Many a scene has been ruined by the thoughtless tapping of a foot or twiddling of a pair of thumbs. Movement catches the eye, and when the eye wanders the mind follows it. Everything on the stage should contribute to the focus of the audience's eye.

Some players find it difficult to sit down naturally. Although in real life they accomplish the feat with a minimum of effort, when they get on a stage they seem to be in mortal fear of stumbling or missing the chair

altogether. The inexperienced actor seems to find it necessary to fix the prospective repository of his posterior with a firm glance—often two—before maneuvering his torso into position for careful lowering. Try to avoid “pointing” a chair you are about to sit in, and don’t stop your speech completely during the operation. Unless it is important business, the less conscious the audience is of your act the better.

When you sit down, sit up. For one thing, as has been mentioned, you will be able to speak more clearly, and for another you will look better. If you are a woman, and not of the distinctly “sporty” type, be chary about crossing your legs. Cross them at the ankles, but not knee over knee unless you wish to foster an appearance of careless abandon. The footlights bring the lower half of your anatomy into unnatural prominence, and discretion is the better part of valor.

A word of caution in this connection may not go amiss with the men too. Some have a wretched habit of pulling up their trouser legs as they sit. Generally born of nervousness, this sometimes results in an unappetizing display of masculinity not called for in the text. Leave your trouser legs alone. You can have your suit pressed before the next performance.

Although it is the duty of the director to place his players to the best advantage and in a manner calculated to bring the proper character into prominence at the proper time, the individual actor can contribute a great deal to the process known as “dressing stage.” This is simply the arrangement of the performers so that none

is blocked from the vision of the audience and the stage is not too unbalanced. Carrying this to the point of making A cross right when B crosses left, as though the stage were an imaginary seesaw, is unnecessary, but a reasonable balance of the players is desirable, and a judicious spacing will relieve the eye of the audience as well as keep all the actors before them. One must always remember that the stage is open only at one side and that at best the grouping must be to a certain extent artificial.

And this seems to be a good point at which to discuss the subject of making your theater "true to life." In the first place the limitation of time and space and the fundamental convention of the three-sided stage make absolute reality almost impossible, and in the second place, if complete verity actually were attained it would be irritating and a bore. The whole appeal of the theater is dependent upon the powers of selection of the author, the director and the actors. Discrimination and emphasis are essential qualities; a play should be a painting and not a photograph. Just as the author discards dozens of speeches that, while natural enough, do not contribute to the progress of his play, so does the actor discard dozens of natural little movements, mannerisms, and attitudes that not only do not advance the play but actually retard the movement. The business of keeping comparatively motionless when someone else is speaking is not like life, save in abnormally polite circles, and the very placing of the furniture on the stage would seem a trifle unusual unless the imaginary fourth wall were all glass and looked out on an amazingly interesting view.

With such fundamental artificialities in the very groundwork of the stage it seems absurd to demand complete fidelity to life from the actors. It is their job to interpret character and convey plot. Any playwright will tell you that a vital point in the development of his story must be forcefully presented to the audience two or three times at least. Is it reasonable to expect the actor not to emphasize in similar fashion such phases of his character development as are important to the plot? And even in the rendition of casual speeches, a certain special timing is of assistance to the audience's quick comprehension of the thought.

It is true that we seek an *effect* of naturalness, but that is obtained usually only by virtue of skilled technique. Very few players by *being* natural can *appear* natural. Unless the characterization calls for marked "underplaying," the actor, like the painter, must know the value of color and shading to present a convincing and satisfying picture to his audience.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *Beware of hands in pockets.*
2. *Keep still unless you have something definite to do.*
3. *Use hand-props with moderation.*
4. *Make movements definite and crisp.*
5. *Try to hold part of your exit speech to the exit itself.*
6. *Don't "point" chairs before sitting.*
7. *Avoid unnecessary movement during the speech of another actor.*
8. *Acting is portraiture, not photography.*

Chapter V

THE CAST AS A WHOLE

Good actors always try to give their associates upon the stage the fullest advantage of their lines. It seems hardly necessary to say that good teamwork is essential to the proper production of any play. Whether it is because audiences have become more intelligent in their appreciation of plays or because the old-fashioned era of the star system is in less repute, the fact remains that more and more frequently successful plays are outstanding because of the excellence of performance in the minor as well as the major roles. Team work, which is increasingly manifest on the professional stage, is even more essential in community dramatics in which of necessity the weaker links require a maximum of support. When all is said and done the amateur dramatic society thrives upon its departing audience saying, "Wasn't that a good play?" rather than, "Wasn't so-and-so great?" If your organization can give your subscribers or patrons a happy evening in the theater because they enjoyed the performance as a whole, you will have progressed many steps beyond the kind of production that elicits praise chiefly from the friends and relatives of those who played the major roles.

A term which has achieved a definite place in the language is "upstage." If one actor stands farther away from the footlights, *i.e.*, "upstage," from his fellow player when he is conversing with him he will force the other to turn his back upon the audience and thereby cause its attention to be focused upon himself. Performers who are given to this trick earn a reputation of playing "upstage," a selfish performance, and a term which has become, in the vernacular of our language, descriptive of those who in their own minds are superior to their neighbors. Unless it is the director's wish to concentrate attention on a specific individual, no actor should deliberately force another to subordinate himself in this fashion.

A spirit of co-operation is essential to the proper performance of a play, and this applies not only to what the players do but also to what they *don't* do. Absence of movement on the part of those who are not speaking, and a manifestation of attentiveness (unless it is definitely out of character or contrary to the plot), materially contribute to the audience's concentration and interest. The character playing the leading role in a play very quickly captures the major attention of the audience. At such times as it is desirable for purposes of plot to turn this attention to one of the minor characters, it is more than essential that the lead should definitely subordinate himself and by his own efforts concentrate the eyes and interest of the audience upon his fellow actor. Not only does this contribute to the proper interpretation of the play as the author intended, but it is a decided assistance

in building up a spirit of teamwork that is just as essential behind the footlights as on the gridiron or the baseball field.

Very few people realize what an important part of the comedian's success is dependent upon the collaborator who "feeds" him his lines. The art of subordination, of attentiveness and manifest appreciation upon the part of the "stooge," contributes almost as much to the happiness of the audience as do the witticisms of the headliner. Although perhaps the most spectacular of our popular stars are flamboyant egoists, the backbone of the theater is supplied by a host of sincere artists who recognize the value of repression and repose and to whom modesty is not a feigned emotion.

The minor roles in the average amateur organization generally fall to the lot of the less experienced players. Although it is natural to concentrate most of the direction upon those who have the greatest number of lines, many a performance is wrecked by the behavior of the butler, the policeman, the delegation, or the crowd. As a matter of fact, the average amateur production would almost always be benefited by more concentration upon the minor roles and the walk-ons.

Audiences of amateur productions are forever looking for errors in detail. They do not expect Helen Smith and Jimmie Brown to equal Bernhardt and a Barrymore, and if these local stars fall short of perfection, there will be no grounds for cavil, but as has been mentioned before, what the audience does look for and takes a perverse delight in finding are the clumsy super, the ill-timed

curtain, the insecure mustache, the absent hand prop, the forgotten line and the unconvincing mob.

It is accordingly a sound idea for the director to give at least as much, if not more, attention to the mechanics of his play than he does to its higher values. If he has a reasonably smooth production, the audience will frankly have a better time.

Mob scenes and walk-ons can really make or mar a play. There are a few simple rules that may profitably be followed.

First of all, the individuals taking part must not look at the audience. Partially because of the fact that he was pressed in at the last minute and really didn't want to be one of the soldiers anyway, Eddie Smith has little feeling of responsibility for the success of the play as a whole; and what is more, he has been made up since seven-thirty and is pretty much fed up with standing by behind the scenes. It is fairly natural, therefore, that when he is unleashed and emerges into the glare of the footlights, he finds himself either staring at the audience in frank curiosity or making an apologetic grimace in the direction of some previously located friend or relative. It is simply fatal to the whole effect, however, if some member of the bloodthirsty crowd that has come in communistic fury to attack Marie Antoinette bestows a smile on Aunt Minnie in the fourth row.

From the standpoint of the audience the mob is a unit and it is of the utmost necessity that it should therefore have unified action and a single focus of its joint attention. It may be artificial but it is very much safer to give every

member of such a supporting group more or less the same direction for his attention throughout the period on the stage. Sometimes, of course, this is impractical, and each must be given specific and independent things to do, but a certain consistency of motif and concentration on the business at hand is essential, and every single movement should be set for each member of the group before the curtain rings up on the opening performance.

By the same token the *ad lib* speeches of the participants in group scenes should be definitely assigned. Each member must have a specific speech to make and speak it distinctly and verbatim albeit simultaneously and individually unheard. In the case of off-stage speeches this rule is equally essential. The most convincing method of achieving the effect of off-stage mobs is simply to take any newspaper or magazine article, cut it up and give a section to each member of the assembly, and have them start reading simultaneously. If this is not done, a large percentage of the group will make unintelligent noises, and the effect will be confused and unconvincing. Furthermore, if no specific speech is given each player yet all are impressed with the necessity of speaking actual words, the predominance of "Mary had a little lamb" and the Gettysburg Address is amazing. If not controlled, it is liable to have a devastating effect over the footlights. Off-stage crowds must not be choruses, nor must they sound like a hungry kennel.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *Don't try to make the audience think of you ahead of the play.*
2. *Members of mobs must be individually rehearsed and have a single focus.*
3. *Ad lib speeches should be set.*
4. *Off-stage crowds mustn't grunt, mumble, or go "Wah-wah-wah!"*

Chapter VI

PROPERTIES

It usually takes the inexperienced performer a little while to get used to even the simplest of physical movement about the stage, and anything he has to use or even handle appears to present a problem. Even lighting a cigarette sometimes becomes tricky and putting one out is often a minor ordeal. (A spot of water in the ash-trays is not a bad idea.)

Hand props should be dealt out as soon as your actors' hands are book-free. He should become familiar as soon as possible with everything he is going to have to use in the play. And he should work with the very thing he is going to have on opening night. But he rarely has it. For some extraordinary reason, it is almost impossible for a director of an amateur group to succeed in rounding up for rehearsal *the actual props that are to be used in the play*. It isn't that property men—or women—are unintelligent or unobliging—quite the reverse in most cases. They just simply seem to be totally unable to produce the right thing *first*. It isn't ignorance; it isn't perfectionism. They simply have to give you something to "do with" until they get something else. "Take this for now"—"These aren't the ones we're going to use, but—" "We'll

have a better one tomorrow." It isn't a matter of time. You can give them the prop list as soon as you have your first reading. You can give them the size, weight, shape, color and historical background of anything you need, with pictures if you like, and for the first rehearsal "with props," you'll get an umbrella for a sword and a ruler for a dagger. Property men are congenital substitutes. And the time often comes when you are gratefully accepting substitutes for substitutes.

Get yourself a good property-man and convince him of the need of giving the actor the actual prop as soon as possible. Dissuade him from surprising the Count on opening night with a snazzy monocle, instead of the beribboned pince-nez he has been working with. Don't let him, at the last minute, put two over-stuffed pillows in the hard-worked armchair "to dress up the stage." And see to it that he counts his ash trays and has an immutable law of distribution for them.

As a general rule, the actor, having been given his personal small hand props, should be personally responsible for them, taking them to the dressing-room and making a check list of them with any change of costume and for each entrance. Other hand props such as breakfast trays, newspapers, tennis racquets and the like, and all props to be discovered on stage, are the responsibility of the property man. If possible, he should have a table near each entrance to the scene, from which the actor may acquire what he needs on the way on and upon which he may deposit it again on the way out. A check

list is essential. A large laundry basket for the requirements of each act is helpful.

There is one phase of the business of props that is worth special comment. Occasionally an actor must handle letters or telegrams which he receives on the stage. Frequently, he must read these aloud. In the latter case, there is no harm in having the exact copy written out for him on the letter or wire he receives. As a matter of fact, if he is actually reading from the page, his tone and manner may be more convincing than if he were reciting memorized lines.

If, however, he does not read off the copy, it is up to the property man to make sure that there are words on the paper and that it is not a blank sheet. These words had, preferably, make no sense or they might distract the attention of the actor. In any case, he should be familiar with the page before it confronts him on stage.

When envelopes that have, presumably, come through the mail, are delivered on stage, make sure that they really have been stamped, mailed and cancelled. The blank envelope that has been scrawled on, with an outline for a stamp, are frequently subject to detection by the audience who, foolishly, are ready to pounce on any such inaccuracy. It is just as simple to use an envelope that has been through the mail, but it is surprising how often the property man does his own scribbling.

A word has been said about the unexpected pillow which might prove to be an irritation to the actor, but this is not meant to discourage the use of decorative

props where they will not interfere with the action. If you are so fortunate as to have a one-set play which may be left standing from one performance to the next, by all means let your scene designer dress up his set with appropriate pictures, vases of flowers, etc. This has been mentioned before and is worth repeating. The convincing set is a fine first step toward a convincing production. Be wary, however, of the use of mirrors and clocks. Clocks which don't run are obviously bad and those that do may not coincide with passing of time as the author has written it. Unless the clock is a vital part of the play, it had better not be obvious to the audience as a time-piece. Mirrors, although occasionally necessary to the play, should be avoided, and in no case should they reflect lights from any point. If your stage is lit only by footlights, a small block of wood under the back of the bottom of the mirror will usually eliminate this reflection, but if borders or spots are used, check very carefully that your mirror does not pick up any reflection from any angle. Soaping or otherwise misting a mirror always looks artificial and should be done only as a last resort.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *Start using hand props as soon as possible.*
2. *The actor should be responsible for his own hand props.*
3. *Decorate your set but keep the action in mind.*
4. *Be wary of clocks and mirrors.*

Chapter VII

COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

The question of costume is one which requires planning. In modern drama the chief consideration is to avoid any clashes of color on the stage. The ladies of the cast must arrange to appear in dresses that afford a variety of colors which do not swear at each other. The general tint of the scenery must also be borne in mind. Just as a pretty face helps a characterization, a pleasing color scheme aids a production.

Avoid "dressing up." The hero of a contemporary comedy need not wear a carnation. Unless the part calls for a certain amount of dressiness, most of the males can afford to walk on stage for the regular performance pretty much as they normally appear at rehearsals. A universally spic-and-span appearance, while gratifying to the wives and mothers in the audience, is occasionally out of character.

In costume drama dispense as much as possible with excess paraphernalia. Swords are particularly dangerous. The wise director will arrange for General Grant to turn his badge of office over to an orderly at the first possible moment, or at least deposit it on an upstage table before

it gets an opportunity to demonstrate its devilish ability to complicate the business of sitting down.

Cloaks, shepherds' crooks, helmets, trains, bridal bouquets, guns, walking sticks and the like, which may help to complete the picture upon the character's entrance, should be discarded at the first possible opportunity. They are liable to impede the action as well as disconcert the actor.

Hats for the men are admirable things to eliminate if possible. Wherever permissible, it is advisable to presume that there is a receptacle in the entrance hallway that has captured the male headgear before the owner has appeared on stage. Otherwise, even though he may be able to toss his panama lightly and naturally on the divan up right, Sir Gerald will invariably find himself either making his exit inconveniently to the left or forgetting altogether to retrieve the hat—which is precisely the sort of thing your "friendly" audience takes a keen delight in.

In the matter of make-up, as a general rule for the amateur the less make-up the better. Of course, the size of your theater and the character of your lighting sometimes make necessary considerable facial preparation, but in the average intimate playhouse utilized by most non-professional groups, there is a definite tendency to *over* make-up. In the case of women, regular evening make-up somewhat overaccentuated usually suffices. A little shadow on the eyelids and an accentuation of the lines under the eye are in general all that is necessary in addition to what is normally used, save that the mascara

on the lashes is more legitimate on the stage than in the drawing room.

In the case of men, a soft line of brown or blue (the former for a brunet and the latter for a blond) just over the eyelashes and under the eyes, as close as possible along the line of the lower lashes, plus a little rouge applied with a rabbit's foot high on the cheek bones, will normally suffice. In some cases lip rouge, dabbed on and smoothed over, is more effective than dry rouge. It depends upon the oiliness of the skin. In either case, apply the color high and keep it away from the nose. And go easy: you don't want to look like Whittier's "Barefoot Boy" with a high fever. Lip rouge is generally essential for the mouth, but should be applied with extreme moderation and generally only to the central portion. Two upward strokes with a little rouge on the little finger applied to either side of the center of the upper lip and a little rubbing along the main portion of the lower lip will suffice. Be careful always to avoid going over the natural lip line with rouge. The greedy-child appearance of the excessive use of red is always deplorable.

Men's eyebrows generally need little attention. Beware of getting them too black. Blonds can use a brown pencil to emphasize them, but a solid effect is unnatural and it is better to err on the side of too little rather than too much.

If grease paint is to be used, be sure to be thorough about it and apply an even and complete base not only to your face but behind your ears and around the upper

part of your neck. It is a very general error on the part of the amateur performer to appear in a mask-like effect because of the fact that he is unable to see the backs of his ears in his mirror, an omission which is unhappily denied the audience. By all means avoid a definite line of cleavage where your grease-paint activities have come to a marginal conclusion. In every case where grease-paint is used, the make-up should be completed by a liberal application of the proper shade of powder applied with a puff and dusted off with a make-up brush.

In the matter of mustaches and beards, avoid them where you can, but if it has not been possible to cast to type and false hirsute adornment is essential, make it as much a part of the face as is possible. The most successful way to do this is by the use of crepe hair applied with spirit gum. A made-up beard is rarely convincing, but its appearance can be greatly improved by adding a little matching crepe hair along the edges to conceal the line of demarcation. Do this after the beard is well set, and be sparing in the use of extra hair; a very little skillfully applied and brushed in with the hand will do the trick.

A made-up mustache is frequently preferable to a crepe one, but only if it has been properly sewn by a professional and is firmly affixed with spirit gum. In using such a mustache always cut it in half and apply it to the upper lip in two sections. This gives flexibility to the lip and prevents the horrible gesticulatory antics frequently observed as a result of a badly conceived bit of facial

decoration. In no case should a mustache be painted on the lip.

If a wig must be used, be sure it fits, particularly at the base of the neck. All too many have a tendency to stand out at the back with an eaves-like effect. If the wig is the type that has a high forehead requiring a cloth front-piece, be sure to use grease paint and cover the band liberally so that it blends well with the make-up, using plenty of powder to help conceal the edge of the wig. But, if possible, avoid such wigs altogether.

A final warning should be given about hands and arms. At least wash them before going on, and if you are doing "character," make them up. Red hands are not lovely things, and all too frequently hands and face don't match!

Needless to say, this advice covers only what is known as "straight" make-up and makes no attempt to include character work or to be in any sense a comprehensive discussion. It is rather calculated to provide a few words of warning against the more obvious dangers that threaten the amateur performer, and act as a gentle reminder of the prime advisability of casting as near as possible to type and putting a minimum of reliance upon grease paint and crepe hair.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *Don't "dress up."*
2. *Avoid clumsy properties.*

3. *Don't use too much make-up.*
4. *Be sparing with rouge.*
5. *Don't forget the backs of your ears and neck.*
6. *Don't forget to wash and, if in character, to make up your hands.*
7. *Use as little false hair as possible.*

Chapter VIII

THE JOB OF DIRECTING

The director who undertakes to put on an amateur show is immediately faced with a number of problems which would not be his upon a professional stage. He must first of all seek to obtain the confidence of his cast. If he is a home-grown product this will be particularly difficult to do, because of the essential verity of the proverb that a prophet is without honor in his own country. If, however, he frankly assumes responsibility for the success of the play and convinces the players that he, and by his own admission, the audience, will hold them blameless of anything that they do because of any direction of his which may be contrary to their own conception of their parts, he may be able to mold his material into a unified product.

He has two things primarily to think of: first and foremost, that he must do his own preliminary work prior to the rehearsal; and second, that subordinate characters must, as far as possible, be spared painful hours of waiting at rehearsals.

If the director has a clear idea of what he wants and has plotted out a movement of the actors best calculated to attain this, hours of rehearsal will be saved. This will

naturally reduce the "standing about" time of his cast, both on stage and off.

Sometimes a director can arrange his rehearsal schedule so that, by concentrating on certain scenes on certain nights, he can relieve some of his cast of attending at all. The more considerate he is of sparing the players from unnecessary attendance, the more concentration and better work he will probably get when they are necessarily present. A word of caution is essential here however. It is very dangerous to be lax about the bit players. If players with small parts are permitted to be absent from too many rehearsals, they commit an injustice to the other actors who have scenes with them. No matter how brilliantly a minor actor may read the few lines he has, the effect of a scene may be damaged if it has not quite jelled due to an insufficient number of complete rehearsals.

In preparing for rehearsals the director, of course, must first of all thoroughly familiarize himself with the play; he must arrive at a clear conception of each character; he must be ready to evaluate, with reason, any individual interpretation which one of his actors may bring to a role and be sure that it is properly in character and helpful to the progress of the plot.

He must, of course, plan the movement of his play, trying to arrange to have his players placed in the right positions for the most effective projection of a scene. In general, the actor with the most significant speech should have visual prominence at the time of making it.

Such prominence can, of course, be most simply attained

by placing the speaker directly center upstage with the eyes of all the cast turned directly to him. This, however, is not always convenient or practical. Let him have one-half the stage to himself and place the others on the other half facing him and there is even greater emphasis upon him. Frame him in a doorway—elevate him on a stool or a stair, make him the apex of almost any triangular formation but, in every case—unless by some chance the exigencies of the plot demand that he be ignored by his associates—focus the attention of his fellow players upon him.

The director should always have the stage picture in mind and to achieve desirable effects each movement of each player must be definitely established. All stage crosses and the timing of exits and entrances must be planned in advance and any danger of one actor's "blocking" another should be anticipated and resolved. Motivation must be found for necessary stage crosses and extra business added when necessary to accomplish this. Naturally, there will be times when, in actual rehearsal, the director may want to do some experimenting and may find it desirable to change some of his preliminary layout work, but it is unfair to his cast for him to wait until he has them on stage before he begins a trial and error method of arranging and moving them.

When the time comes for the director to start putting his cast through its paces, he will be wise if he insists upon having a competent and experienced prompter. The selection of a prompter is frequently left until the last minute and generally ends by being no selection at all

but the grateful acceptance by a harried director of any unwary member who may be cajoled into service. Mrs. Jones, who had just returned from a visit to the coast, may be recruited for the job the night before the dress rehearsal. She is unfamiliar with the play but she has a young son who could substitute for her, God forbid, should she prove indisposed on the night of the performance. And now, if anyone knows his lines well enough to lend her a copy of the play, and everyone should by now, don't you think?—that's off our mind.

This is bad. The first thing to be done after the play is cast and a schedule set, is to beg, borrow, or steal a reliable prompter, one ready to appear at the first rehearsal. Sometimes the prompter and the stage manager are one. This is inadvisable because, on the night of the play, they have separate jobs to do. The prompter may properly be called the assistant director. It is his job to tabulate the business of a show, as well as to supply the elusive line. His work begins with the first rehearsal. He notes not only the directed movement of each actor, but also any special readings of lines or business given.

"You told me to do it this way last time," says the harassed actor. "Did I?" asks the director, and it is the prompter who should have the answer.

He should attend every rehearsal. In the preliminary stages, while the cast still have books in their hands, he acts as the director's amanuensis and records the action of the play. It is generally advisable to secure a large notebook or ledger for this purpose. The pages of the script should be pasted into this so that a large margin is

allowed—top, bottom, and sides—for notes. The movement of each actor is indicated thereon, as well as his exact position in relation to others. All pieces of business or special instructions of the director should be carefully noted. These may, occasionally, be somewhat altered during the progress of rehearsals—although the good director tries to lay out his play so well in advance as to reduce such changes to a minimum—and the prompt-book must be kept up to date at all times.

The work of the prompter or “assistant director,” involves more than the business of the cast. He is responsible, in collaboration with the stage manager, for off-stage activities as well. He must give the signals for all off-stage noises, the cue for light effects and the warning for the lowering of the curtain. This is normally done by hand signals to a stage manager or his assistant, but the prompter, who usually has the only clear view of the stage, is the liaison officer between the performers and the crew behind the scenes. His book is usually marked with a preliminary notation of “Warning” for an off-stage effect or curtain, at which point he makes sure that the stage-hand is alerted at his post for bell, lights or rope.

The importance of the timing of such effects cannot be over-emphasized. The difference between a professional performance and that of accomplished amateurs is often unfairly accented by carelessness in this department. How often have we witnessed the light that responds belatedly to the switch, the telephone that keeps on ringing after the receiver has been lifted, the gun that goes off shortly after the victim collapses and the curtain that

either cuts off the tag-line or, oblivious to it, leaves a frustrated cast in embarrassed immobility.

Such mechanical failings are totally unnecessary. Granted that the average amateur stage lacks the facilities of the professional, ordinary effects can almost always be managed, even though some simplification may be necessary. Failure to function is nearly always due to insufficient planning and too little practice. It is up to the stage manager to be responsible for *everything* that occurs off-stage. A lapse on the part of an actor frequently passes unnoticed or is quickly forgotten, but a mechanical blunder is always noticed by the audience and thought about (or worse, talked about) for several succeeding speeches. If the gun fails to go off, and the hapless actor is forced to destroy his enemy with the butt thereof, one can hardly blame the audience for getting out of the rhythm of illusion. And once you let your audience get beyond the confines of your stage and become conscious of their orchestra seats, it takes a bit of doing to recapture them.

In an otherwise excellent amateur performance of *Visit to a Small Planet* recently, an unfortunate stage effect cancelled out a well-played scene. At one point the rifle of a soldier standing guard at the extreme right of the stage is supposed, mysteriously, to leave his hands and hang suspended in the air some six feet above his anguished, upturned face. In this instance, the rifle left his all-too-willing hands, but failed to rise more than a foot or two, where it entered upon a slow rotation on its suspension wire, the focal point of every eye in the

audience. It was within easy reach of recovery by all but an unenterprising midget. The poor guardsman could only recoil in horror and the exigencies of the stage were such that his recoiling room was scant. The resultant tableau commanded the continued attention of the audience, to the exclusion of the stout little group who were carrying on in the center of the stage.

Unfortunately, there is nothing unique about such a mishap as this but, in this instance, there was a curious reaction. Nobody connected with the play seemed to mind! "Oh, the audience expects something like that to happen," they said, or "The play was so well done, it didn't matter." But it did matter. If you are so fortunate as to have a really capable cast, give them all the backstage support you can rally. It is not fair to ask even the best of dancers to do an *entrechat* in ski-shoes.

If your group concedes that "something going wrong" is the hallmark of the amateur and that your audience has come to expect it and you don't wish to disappoint them, the point cannot be argued. On the other hand, when a dozen or so people have devoted all their spare time for five or six weeks toward putting on a performance, they are entitled to all the mechanical support that can be given them, and should not be forced to act against distractions. In this instance, the ascension of the rifle was a climactic point in the play. In fact, there would virtually have been no play without it. All that was required for the smooth execution of this particular maneuver was the intelligent suspension of the rifle with a wire at each end, a careful test of its practicality before

the dress rehearsal, and five or six trial flights prior to the curtain's going up on the first performance. This is part of the stage manager's job.

The tendency to treat the set and off-stage effects as of minor importance is inexcusable. Not only can inadequacies in this department seriously mar a production, but a really pleasing set and truly effective lighting and staging can go far toward providing an enjoyable evening, even though the performance may not be of the highest caliber.

This, however, is digressing rather far from the duties of the prompter. It is up to him, of course, to live in harmony with the stage manager and, in a sense, to direct the stage effects as far as the proper timing in conjunction with the work of his cast is concerned, but after the play once gets into production, his primary obligation is to rescue the aberrant actor. This task requires complete familiarity with the play and often with the idiosyncrasies of the performer. The prompter must have a perfect sense of timing and the skill of a professional quarter-back. He must be prepared to toss the required line at precisely the right second, neatly and cleanly, into the receptive ear of his colleague. It is almost worse to prompt too quickly than not to prompt at all. Nothing irritates an actor more than to have his next speech thrown at him unnecessarily during a dramatic pause. Every intended pause should be carefully indicated in the prompt book and the prompter should further familiarize himself with points at which the individual actor has a tendency to hesitate before a line.

The prompter will find that each player has his own rhythm and he will be able to detect signs of floundering even though the proper lines are eventually delivered. He should stand ready to pitch at any instant, until the player gets back into his regular rhythm.

During actual performances the location of the prompter on stage must necessarily vary with the exigencies of the set. Usually, he may be placed just back of the proscenium on the extreme right or left, preferably on the side with the switchboard. It is generally not advisable to have him directly behind a window or within a fireplace. In such instances, he is more liable to be heard by the audience and his perspective of the stage will necessarily be limited. It is highly desirable that the prompter should have a good view of the stage. Sometimes a line is delayed by a hitch in business. The actor may have trouble lighting his cigarette or have to recover a dropped handkerchief or something of the sort which can only be recognized if seen. A prompt at such a moment is not only unnecessary but distracting and, if heard by the audience, distressing.

It goes without saying that the prompter must never permit anyone to talk to him during a performance and should permit nothing to distract him from the work in hand.

It is an extraordinary thing what curious feats of ineptitude assail prompters. Many are their curious vagaries. There was one well-remembered neophyte, whose notion of the proper procedure was to repeat the last words that the actor had just spoken. It is manifestly unsatisfactory

to receive an echo as an indication of one's next speech. If the individual actor is striving to recall what he should say directly after "Where did I leave my glasses?" he is not happy to receive the whispered message: "Where did I leave my glasses?"

Another prompter of unhallowed remembrance became so interested in a distressed actor's ad libbing that, when the latter finally maneuvered himself within easy hearing distance, he received the encomium: "Keep it up, you're doing great!"

Prompters should practice the actual business of prompting in a previously arranged location on the stage during the dress rehearsal, and the director should place himself in the auditorium to superintend this operation. A little preliminary work in this department can help immeasurably in keeping the audience unaware of the prompter. All too often he is by way of becoming a prominent member of the cast.

In general, it is advisable for the prompter to avoid the passionate hiss. Surprisingly enough, the quietly spoken line is generally less audible in the orchestra pit than the sibilant whisper. The position of the prompter, the set of the scenery and the acoustics of the auditorium should all be tested in advance, however, and it is well worth while to make sure of the best projection of a prompt line from the standpoint both of audibility to the actor and concealment from the audience.

All in all, a truly good prompter is a pearl of great price to any director, and the job should not be casually bequeathed nor lightly undertaken.

As has been noted, the director should plot out his schedule of rehearsals well in advance, excusing such members of the cast as may not be needed upon any specific night. As a matter of fact, it is the part of wisdom so to plot the rehearsals that every member of the cast know that they may rely upon the schedule given them, and further know that they will not be called unless they are needed. In that case they will not resent, nor should they be allowed to criticize, a strict discipline, not only in the matter of attendance, but in regard to concentration during the rehearsals themselves. And, having received such consideration from the director, the cast should be doubly ready to work on their lines. A deadline should be determined at the outset and every member of the cast should be impressed with the faith that no real progress with the production as a whole can begin until every actor really knows his part.

At rehearsals there is nothing more disturbing to a performer than a hum of comment or rustle of movement during his rendition of the speeches which he is trying to memorize and learn to deliver. However, if the director expects to be able to keep those off stage silent and attentive, he must put a certain life into his job of directing. He must be alert and, in so far as is possible without delaying the progress of rehearsal, he must be entertaining. He must explain why he wants certain things done as he directs. He must give concrete and definite directions and, as pointed out before, he must not alter these except in the event of utmost necessity. He must be an enthusiast about the play, and he must

obviously be part and parcel of it, referring to the actors by their names in the play and giving directions in the terms of the imaginary stage set. Every suggestion and every instruction made during a rehearsal must be with the absolute visualization of the scene as it will be set and the people as the characters which they are supposed to convey. Nothing on the stage which is out of character with the part to be portrayed should be permitted. For example, if Mr. Joseph Jackson is undertaking the part of the Judge, he must not be allowed to chew gum during the rehearsal, and in calling his attention to the fact, the director should address him as "Judge" rather than "Joe"—that very approach taking the sting out of the criticism. In similar fashion, if a cigarette is not called for or permissible in the actual performance, it is definitely contraband while the actor is on stage during a rehearsal (and even though Mabel hasn't a single line for five whole pages she's no exception). Strictness in this respect is essential.

It is inadvisable to permit any argument on the part of any individual actor, during the rehearsal, as to the interpretation of his part. It is essential that every member of the cast feel privileged to discuss with the director any phase of the interpretation or any business with which he disagrees, but the proper time is after the rehearsal or prior to it. It is unfair to take time from the performance while the work of one individual is being discussed. Furthermore, the director will inevitably find that if he permits public argument about a single role, he will encourage more of the same among other

members of the cast (who are frequently far from hesitant in joining in the debate of the problem in hand). It is distinctly safer to have it understood that any questions of individual performance should be the subject of private conference. A certain interpretation may be desirable because of its contribution to the total effect although to the actor it may not seem to be in character. In such cases, arbitrary direction should be explained. An appeal to a sense of teamwork and the proper presentation of the idea that the desirability of the effect of the whole is paramount will usually silence not only the Greek chorus but the leading man as well.

Something has already been said about the advisability of working on the minor parts and the walk-ons. This point cannot be overemphasized. Frequently an indifferent play and a somewhat inadequate interpretation of it can be rescued and made successful by a convincingness of background and some snap and precision in the work of the supers on stage and off. It is generally worth devoting an entire evening to rehearsing such scenes as have a crowded stage. Giving each performer set business and spending a little time on the job of making him part of the picture lets him feel personally that he is an important part of the show. There is many a yeoman of the guard who thinks that it doesn't matter much what he does because the director is always too busy with the captain and the colonel's wife to bother about him.

As a matter of fact there is a right way and a wrong way even to carry a spear, and it doesn't hurt to have the director tell the camel driver that he's the best darned

camel driver he's ever rehearsed and spend a minute or two discussing whether or not he should wear a belt with his burnous.

In directing the proper rendering of a speech the coach should, as far as possible, try to get the interpretation he desires by making the actor think it out correctly for himself, so that the proper reading of the line will spring from the thought. It is sometimes necessary, of course, actually to go through the business and read certain speeches in order to get what is wanted from an actor, but as a rule this method of requiring simple mimicry is stiff and unsatisfactory and will not help much in developing any latent talent in the individual. If he is simply imitating the coach the actor's performance is certain to be superficial—and the all-important business of "thinking in character" is liable to be absent.

It is perhaps relevant to enlarge here upon the essential imitative ability of the average amateur. He fundamentally is interested in the theater. He probably has a sort of mature hero-worship for some particular professional actor. He may unconsciously adopt the mannerisms of this individual, and, if not properly controlled, the result may be disastrous.

But not only in this fashion is the imitative gift of the enthusiastic amateur dangerous. He is very liable to take color and tone from those with whom he is immediately associated on the stage. Frequently the result is that an entire scene takes its tone from one dominant performer. The director must be ever watchful against this kind of monotony. Each scene may require a

definite key, but every voice must not fall victim to a distinct pitch. A confident, positive actor may so dominate a scene, both in tempo and in tonal quality, as to rob it of all lights and shades not wholly developed by his own performance. The drama may be lost in the intricacies of a character study. It is up to the director to help each actor maintain his own individuality of speech and movement and to keep his play alive with variety and contrast.

Another problem which every director faces is the handling of off-stage effects. If anything from a telephone bell to a clap of thunder is required, the business should be gone over thoroughly prior to the dress rehearsal. This will not only give the stage manager an opportunity to become familiar with his job and the proper timing of his effects, but it will also enable the actors to accustom themselves to the interruptions. It can be disconcerting to nice Mrs. Jones, who has become used to answering the telephone when the director says "Buzz!" out front, when, at the actual performance she hears, for the first time, a startling clangor about eight feet back of her left shoulder.

The time will come when no more changes can be made; when, God willing, the books or sides are out of the actors' hands and the stage business is set. The dress rehearsal is at hand and the director must tune up his show for the first performance.

By this time, it is to be hoped that he has reached the actual stage upon which performances are to be given. From now on, his problem is to get his actors accustomed

to the doors they must open—the chairs they must sit in—and the cigarette boxes they must locate. This should not be too difficult, but his actors must be given ample opportunity to get used to the distances required to be crossed and the physical feel of the furniture they must work with.

The chief problem which will confront him and inevitably delay him will be the question of lighting. If he has a good stage crew and sufficient equipment, he can do a great deal of planning in advance and he should put in considerable time working out his lighting arrangements prior to calling his cast on stage. Generally, he will want certain spots on stage more brightly lit than others. He will certainly wish to be sure that points at which the most important action occurs are assured of sufficient light. He will ultimately have to have his actors walk through their motions to be sure that such lighting has been achieved, but much time can be saved by preliminary planning.

In general, of course, farce requires the brightest of light and tragedy a definite toning down to the mood of the scene. All drama can be vastly assisted by light values. This all is part of the scene designers' problem as well. He will have had specific lighting in mind when he drew the sets and he and the director and the stage electrician should work closely together as soon as the set is made available to them.

Although some points on the stage will receive more lighting prominence than others, it is obvious that in a

box set differentials cannot be too great, and unless the physical lamps or brackets on the stage justify a bold contrast in light, actors must not walk through shadows created by uneven illumination.

Shadows cast by the actors themselves should also be avoided. Proper crossing of overhead spots can, of course, eliminate most of these. The technique of stage lighting requires a book to itself and we do not pretend to advise here, but a competent director will assure himself that the effects that he seeks do not suffer from inadequate or ill-conceived lighting arrangements.

As has been said, some time prior to the dress rehearsal and even before getting into the actual stage, actors who have cumbersome accoutrements either in costume and/or props should wear or carry them in rehearsal. This applies to swords, helmets, hoop skirts, togas and the like. Anything unfamiliar to everyday living should be sufficiently handled by the actor during rehearsals so that he may be accustomed to it by the night of dress rehearsal.

Swords are, as has been pointed out, the most tricky and uncomfortable of dramatic accessories. The wise director will arrange for his performer to dispense with this embarrassment as soon after his magnificent entrance as possible. Even if the gentleman must fight a duel with it during the ensuing action, perhaps he can retrieve it for that purpose. Otherwise, the unfortunate officer is going to find it inconvenient to sit down and get up, or even walk about naturally.

Period costumes are sometimes disturbing to the wearer

and even distracting to his stage companions. It is a good idea not to wait until the dress rehearsal to familiarize the entire cast with everybody's appearance and problems.

Usually, there is a costume parade and make-up check the day before the dress rehearsal. If this cannot conveniently be held the night before, it must be done before the first curtain goes up. Lighting frequently changes the effect of make-up and adjustments are necessary. There is also necessity for having make-ups pretty much in the same key. If two of the characters have presumably been seeing a good deal of each other prior to the opening of your play, it is indefensible to have one obviously bronzed by the sun and the other apparently but recently emerged from the shelter of a rock.

It is to be presumed that any possible clash of color in the robes of the ladies has long since been taken care of prior to their acquisition.

The stage crew must not be forgotten either. It is to be hoped that they all have rubber-soled shoes to wear and that no lady helper back of the curtain—nor the ushers in front of it either, for that matter—are wearing highly audible taffeta.

A thorough workout with the stage manager and his crew is advisable before the actors begin parading in front of the footlights to get the director's opinion on their costume and make-up. The curtain, lighting cues, and all off-stage effects should be rehearsed separately. If these important matters are let slide until the actual rehearsal is in progress, a great deal of valuable time will be wasted at the expense of the cast. There are always

bound to be hitches of some sort, and it's bad business to keep twelve or twenty nervous actors standing about while Billy tries to find out what's gone wrong with the baby spot.

If there are occasions upon which some character switches on or off lights or in some other way actuates an off-stage effect that requires perfect timing, the director should let him walk through it a couple of times before starting actual rehearsal. Incidentally, the switching on and off of electric lights, the turning up of a lamp wick and the like, are tricky bits of business. The actor must be warned not to take his hand from the switch or lamp until the lighting change has been realized. The delayed current effect is disastrous and another of those things that the wolves in the amateur audience batten upon. In similar fashion, in answering a telephone the actor should be careful not to lift the receiver from the cradle until the bell has stopped ringing.

The director should see to it that all the members of the cast have plenty of time to familiarize themselves with the set, trying such chairs as they have to sit upon during the play, assuring themselves of the location of necessary ash trays and the like.

This is the time, too, for a complete rapport to be established between the actor and the property man. As a rule, each player should be responsible for his own hand props, such as letters, a newspaper, parasol and the like. These should be kept in the dressing room between performances, and it is an excellent practice for each actor to keep a list of these, in the proper

sequence according to the acts in which they are necessary, pasted on his mirror. Larger properties should be the responsibility of the property man, to whose use a table should be devoted at each entrance. At each performance, before every act, each player should check, *both on stage and off*, the location of any object that he may require during the ensuing scenes.

At the first dress rehearsal the cast should go through the play without interruption. This will probably be the director's first chance to see whether or not he has a play. It is too late to do much about any individual performance, and what he must do is to strive for pace and a totality of effect, let the cast get the feel of the play, as being all of a piece and, good, bad, or indifferent, build up their confidence in it and in themselves.

He should not try to work in a lot of last-minute details at the dress rehearsal. A good night's sleep will, in most instances, serve the cast better than the best of advice. There are two unfortunate superstitions about dress rehearsals that have no real foundation. The first is that in the very nature of things, they must last until the small hours of the morning begin to grow larger, and the second that "a bad dress rehearsal means a good performance" and vice versa. Long drawn out last nights are tiring, depressing, and unnecessary if the director has done his job right. There is no reason for the cast to think he's just given up hope if he lets them go home before midnight. As for the "bad rehearsal—good show" theory, it was probably born of some optimistic coach's endeavor to cheer up a gloomy company after everything

had gone wrong the night before an opening. Avoid walking under ladders and steer shy of black cats if you like, but don't get the idea that a good dress rehearsal isn't *always* preferable to a bad one!

Usually the last of the director's jobs is to plot his curtain calls. How this is done will depend, very largely, upon the traditions and temperament of the group for which he is working. Some organizations insist on simply a universal bow, whereas others go in for the star system. There is nothing very difficult about the presentation of the entire cast at once, provided there is room enough on the stage. Simply put the chief characters in the center and, as far as possible, alternate male and female.

When it comes to the individual curtain call, it is both old-fashioned and unwise to have the actors enter, bow and leave one by one. The best way is to have the subordinate members of the cast on stage for a joint bow at the rise of the curtain and then bring on the rest of the cast, preferably in pairs and naturally keeping the "leads" to the last, while all of the cast remain on stage for a final united bow. After that, the curtain can be raised and lowered on the entire group as much as the traffic will bear. Don't wait for the last faint handclap. It is better to miss an extra curtain than to exhaust the appreciation of the audience.

Although there is no question that some members of the cast will be more entitled to applause than others, amateur plays are usually a group operation of general community interest and reward for their efforts may properly be offered them as a unit.

As a rule, it is advisable to limit recipients of curtain call approval to the members of the cast, but there are of course many occasions when a group wishes to honor those who have helped behind the scenes. In these cases, it is not a bad idea to clear the stage of the actors before bringing on the stage hands, property people, prompter, etc. Let them have applause for themselves rather than simply come in to share continued acclaim for the cast.

And, if the play is an enormous success, it is just possible that someone will remember the director. Maybe an exception can be made in his case and he be permitted a solo bow. If he can still walk on the stage and take it.

TO SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY:

1. *The coach must plan his business in advance.*
2. *The prompter must know his business.*
3. *Discipline at rehearsals is essential.*
4. *It is advisable to address the actors by their character names.*
5. *Give individual attention to the minor roles.*
6. *Off-stage effects must be rehearsed in advance.*
7. *Don't try to make over the play at the dress rehearsal.*

A GLOSSARY OF STAGE TERMS

And an occasional comment thereon

Note: This glossary does not pretend to be complete. Space does not permit inclusion of all the technical terms of the theater. The most common and useful expressions, however, may be found and the author believes there is no glaring inaccuracy in the definitions. In some instances, he may perhaps have permitted himself a slight personal bias in his elaboration. There is inevitably a certain elasticity in any interpretation of the stage and its activities. In this belief, the author has, since page one, placed great reliance.

Ad Lib Improvised lines. Generally used to fill in a gap, or at the end of exit speeches to carry the actor completely off stage without interruption. Also, frequently indicated for mob scenes. These speeches, however, should preferably be set and kept as a fixed part of the actor's lines. All too often "ad lib" is the unintentional result of an erratic memory.

Apron That part of the stage that projects beyond the curtain line. Should not be used during a regular play, but valuable to "mammy-singers" and monologists. A bad place to stand when the curtain is coming down.

Asbestos The outer fireproof curtain. Very few members of the regular audiences ever see it, but it is popular with amateurs because it usually has peepholes through which Mama and Uncle Miletus may be seen.

Aside A speech made for the benefit of the audience, and presumably unheard and unnoticed by the other actors. Archaic. Telephones and sympathetic butlers are now preferred.

Baby Spot A small spotlight used to accent a single point on the stage. Useful for supplying light enough to play dramatic scenes on a stage which is not otherwise sufficiently lit.

Back Drop The painted curtain at the rear of a stage set. Largely supplanted by the cyclorama and modern lighting effects.

Backing A flat piece of scenery used to mask the openings occasioned by doors and windows. Don't let your shadow get on it when you are waiting for your entrance.

Back stage That part of the stage which is (or should be) invisible to the audience. A good place to maintain quiet when the performance is on.

Batten A length of wood, generally one inch by four inches, upon which scenery is nailed.

Bit A small part in a play. Not necessarily unimportant, and if badly done frequently ruinous to the total effect of the production.

Blackout 1. *v.* To turn off all the stage lights simultaneously. 2. *n.* A short skit, usually humorous, which depends in large part, for its effect, on an ending more abrupt than even a quick curtain can provide.

Border Both the strip of scenery that masks overhead lights (sometimes called the "teaser" or "sky-border") and the strip of lights itself.

Brace A floor support for scenery. Easy to trip over.

Build Up To play a scene progressively toward a climax. Centering attention upon an approaching event. "Make way for the King!" "Wait till you see Arthur!" and "I sat beside

the most marvelous blonde in the subway this morning" are varying degrees of the same thing.

Bunch A cluster of small bulbs with a reflector, sometimes used in place of a floodlight.

Business Action on stage that supplements or explains the character or speeches. It must in all cases be set and not varied. The most difficult business for the amateur is to do nothing.

Call 1. The warning to stand by for an entrance. 2. A "curtain call" is a raising of the curtain at the end of an act in response to applause. It is preferable to permit none until the end of the play.

Camel Driver A supernumerary. Sometimes referred to as "carrying a spear."

Cast The actors in a play.

Character Part A role in which one characteristic of the personality portrayed (or some regional, racial or professional peculiarity thereof) is overemphasized at the expense of other characteristics. In common parlance, however, the term is very loosely used to cover any role not natural to the actor.

Clear To free the stage of unauthorized encumbrances preparatory to the rise of the curtain. The stage hand who has been reclining on the sofa will have to move, and it's time for Aunt Mabel to return to the audience, where she belongs.

Cross Movement across stage. It should always be motivated and made definitely and purposefully. Can be a great help to characterization.

Cue The little string of words at the end of a speech that calls for business or lines from another actor. Not to be too

greatly depended upon, considering the great gifts of paraphrase among amateurs.

Curtain The customary terminus to a scene or act.

Cut An elimination of part or all of a speech or piece of business. A helpful means of speeding up some scenes—but it should be intentional.

Cyclorama ("Cyc.") A curved curtain, usually light blue, that backs the entire set, and, properly lighted, gives an effect of depth.

Dead Pan An expressionless face generally assumed for comedy purposes but occasionally inadvertent among the unskilled.

Dimmer A device for controlling the brightness of any light or group of lights. Must be deftly manipulated to avoid the effect of a spasmodic sunset or a kangaroo dawn.

Downstage Toward the footlights.

Drape A modern form of stage backing to supplant painted flats, depending on the stage furniture and lighting to produce effects. A useful and economical device for small groups, and a convenience for stages with insufficient room overhead for scene changes. Drapes, however, tend to deaden sound, and thought must be given to audibility.

Draw Curtain A curtain that divides in the middle.

Dressing Stage Shifting position to avoid blocking an associate from the view of the audience, or to help balance the stage picture. Requires some art to avoid being obvious, and ought never to involve a military sidestep. Also: putting on curtains, vases, etc.

Dry To "go dry" or "dry up" is that painful state of inarticulateness that once in a while is liable to assail any actor.

Those chronically afflicted with this malady, however, are dangerous people in your play, for in its most acute forms, with the inability to speak seems to go a curious ineptitude at hearing, so that even the stentorian efforts of the prompter sometimes go unheeded. If George invariably dries up, let him shift scenery in the next show. There silence is a virtue.

Effects Machines for making off-stage noises. Should be sparingly used, and only by those who have practiced. Even a Richard Mansfield may be an unconvincing hand with a wind machine.

Fake To convey the appearance of doing something without actually doing it. Particularly essential in connection with eating and drinking scenes. Obvious fakes must be avoided. Opaque glasses in cocktail scenes are preferable to the usual impression that the host serves bad gin. The silly business of an actor's enthusiastically taking a cocktail, wetting his lips, and then putting it down and forgetting all about it is regrettably common even on the professional stage.

Feed The process of playing second fiddle in dialogue.

Fill To improvise lines or business to cover up an unforeseen gap in a performance.

Fishing The verbal stabs at lines made by an actor feeling his way through a scene that is but dimly lit in the foyer of his memory.

Flats Mounted pieces of scenery. Usually held in place by stage braces and lashed together.

Flies The space over the stage above the proscenium and under the gridiron upon which unused scenery is hoisted out of sight.

Floods Large standing high-voltage lamps used to light the stage from the wings. They burn up a lot of electricity and

give off a lot of heat. Turn them off promptly when not needed.

Floor Cloth A covering for the flooring of the stage; theoretically permanent, but in rented theaters frequently conspicuous by its absence.

Foots The row of small lights set into the apron of the stage, usually amber, blue and pink.

Front That part of the theater which faces the stage. "Out front" is a place actors in make-up or costume should *never* go.

Gelatin A colored type of isinglass set in frames to fit flood lamps and spotlights in order to produce special lighting effects. Generally used in blue, amber and pink—and almost anyone can stick his finger through them.

Give Way To move one's position for the benefit of another actor, who either is being masked or is not receiving sufficient emphasis because of stage congestion.

Gridiron (Grid) The steel network above the stage from which the borders, curtain, backdrops, and occasionally mounted scenery is hung.

Grips Stage hands—the men who shift the scenery and have the privilege of referring to any member of the cast with the disparaging comment: "Aw, he's only an actor!"

Ham A term of opprobrium used to designate the type of artificial actor who generally overplays his part and is inclined to take his art with rather more sobriety than it merits.

Heavy The villain of the piece.

Hero 1. The character best calculated to elicit the appreciative sympathy of the audience—the one who marries the girl in the end. 2 (Rare). The fellow who *volunteers* to be prompter.

Heroine The feminine counterpart of the above.

Hokum Any stage artifice obviously forced, but tried and true in the matter of results.

Hold It To remain static during a laugh, or for purposes of stress during a tense dramatic moment. Avoid "holding it" too long. And be sure the prompter is aware of your intention, or he may think you have forgotten your lines.

Hold The Book To prompt, or in individual cases, simply to "hear lines." No fun.

House Generally used to refer to the audience. Before the curtain goes up "a good house" signifies a large number of paid admissions. After the curtain is up it means an appreciative and responsive audience.

Ingenue The juvenile actress who plays naïve parts and is subordinate to the heroine.

In One On the forepart of the stage in front of a backdrop hung from one of the first sets of lines. "In two" is a little deeper but not yet full stage.

Juvenile An actor who interprets youthful roles. They do grow up—and then somebody should always tell them.

Knife A curtain which descends from above in a line parallel to the stage. Bear it in mind when taking a bow.

Lash Line A short rope tied to each flat piece of scenery and used to bind the set. Stage hands love to slap them against the canvas.

Lead The principal part in a play. Not always the best one from an actor's standpoint.

Left Left from the standpoint of the actor—*i.e.*, to the audience's right.

Lift It To enliven a scene by increasing the tempo and raising the pitch. Actors who can do it without an effort are usually elected president of the club within two years.

Lighten It To make a speech less emphatic by more speed, higher key, or both.

Line 1. A row of words in a part. Sometimes used to refer to a whole speech; e.g., "What's my line?" 2. One of the ropes used for hoisting scenery.

Make-up 1. Paint and powder, wigs, crepe hair, putty, mascara, etc., used to obtain facial effects on the stage. 2. The finished product.

Mask To conceal someone or something from the sight of a part or all of the audience. A thing to be particularly watched in the case of deep stages.

Mug To overplay a part facially. "Hams" "mug."

Off-Stage "Back-stage" but not "on stage."

On Stage In view of the audience. Also, if given as a stage direction, it means toward the center of the stage.

Paper Complimentary tickets to the performance. Known professionally as "Annie Oakleys," because of the fact that free tickets are usually punched. Annie Oakley was a famous markswoman who gave exhibitions of her prowess in Buffalo Bill shows.

Part 1. A role in a play. 2. The pamphlet containing the speeches and cues of any single role.

Picture A grouping of players to create a dramatic effect.

Pipes The metal rods hung from the gridiron on which lights, borders, cyclorama, etc. are suspended. They are rigged on pulleys and balanced by counterweights.

"Places!" The order to stand by preparatory to the rise of the curtain, after the stage is clear. Last call for clearing the throat.

Plant 1. *v.* To emphasize by stress or repetition an important part of the plot in the minds of the audience. 2. *n.* A confederate in the audience.

Play to the Curtain The business of increasing the speed of the action toward the end of an act to build up the climax at the curtain. Particularly necessary in comedy and farce.

Plot 1. The story of the play. 2. The diagrammatic layout or scheme for lighting, off-stage effects, properties, etc. An important preliminary to any successful production.

Plug To reiterate emphasis on a point already planted.

Point To throw a high-light upon a speech or action.

Practical Working, as contrasted with "fake." A "practical light-switch," for example, is one that actually is connected up with an on-stage lamp. Sometimes doors must have "practical locks," although as a rule it is decidedly impractical really to lock them during the course of a play.

Prompt To hold the book on the play and see to it that the actors deliver more or less what the author wrote, actually repeating to the faltering performer such speeches as appear to have eluded him. A low-pitched but distinct voice should be used. Avoid the hoarse whisper. It is amazingly audible to the audience, and as a rule curiously unintelligible to the harassed actor. It is also part of the prompter's duty to give signals for off-stage effects and generally act as a liaison between the performers and the crew.

Property Any movable object that is necessary to the action of the play. Those which are carried by the actor ("hand props") should generally be kept by him on his own responsi-

bility. He should make a list of them, noting the acts in which their use is necessary, pin it on the mirror in his dressing room, and check with it before each entrance. Other properties are the responsibility of the property man, who collects them—a large laundry basket is useful—after each act and checks them before each rise of the curtain.

Props Short for “properties,” and the usual designation of the property man.

Proscenium The arch that frames the stage.

Return A wing of a flat piece of an interior setting which turns off the stage back of either side of the proscenium opening.

Right Right from the standpoint of the actor—*i.e.*, to the audience’s left.

Ring Up To raise the curtain on the opening of a play. Every effort should be made to do this on time. If the audience is kept waiting the cast starts out under a handicap. The late beginning, moreover, is one of those hallmarks of the amateur at which the Philistines jeer. To “ring down,” while usually referring to the end of the play, is the process of lowering the curtain at any point.

Royalty The fee to the publisher or author for the privilege of presenting a copyright play. For amateur productions this is usually from \$25 to \$50 for each performance of a long play, and from \$5 to \$10 for one-act plays and sketches.

Scene A division of an act. As indicated on the program this generally refers specifically to such times as the curtain is lowered, but in ordinary parlance “scene” is used to refer to any well-defined episode in a play involving a single group of actors. This more nearly approximates the Shakespearean

(and modern French) division, in which any entrance or exit of one or more characters automatically occasioned a new scene.

Script The text of the play.

Set 1. *v.* To prepare the stage for the play. 2. *n.* A unit of scenery inside of which the action of the play takes place.

Side A page in an actor's individual part. Parts are usually typewritten scripts containing the cues, speeches, and stage directions of a single character. These pages are usually eight by five-and-a-half inches, and any part having thirty sides or more is a fairly big part.

Spot A movable light usually thrown from the balcony to bring one or more individual actors into prominent relief. Its chief use is in musical productions. For straight drama the baby spot from within the proscenium usually suffices.

Stall To fill, by improvisation—to spar for time during an unforeseen delay. (In England, a theater seat.)

Steal To distract the attention of the audience from the desired focus. Any uncalled-for movement or undesignated business is liable to do this, and, if deliberate, is a very naughty trick indeed. Sometimes, however, a minor character is said to “steal the show” simply because the excellence of his performance overshadows the more prominent parts of the principals.

Stooge A comedian's helper—sometimes a “plant” in the audience—who feeds lines and exchanges wisecracks with the principal.

Straight Normal and natural. The opposite of “character” in referring to parts. To “play it straight” means to avoid mannerisms and the excessive dramatization of a role.

Strike The term used to signify the removal of a piece of stage furniture or scenery. To strike a chair is to take it off the stage. To "strike the set" is to dismantle the scene completely.

Strips A border of lights hung vertically in the wings. It usually casts a shadow if you stand in front of it.

Super Short for "supernumerary"—a "walk-on."

Tableau Curtain The type of draw curtain that is gathered up in loops and draped on each side, instead of simply parting in the middle.

Tag The last line of the play. There is a superstition that it should never be spoken until the dress rehearsal.

Take a Bow To acknowledge the applause of the audience. Don't do it in the middle of a scene.

Take Stage To assume the most prominent position in a scene, usually by moving to the center of the stage. It is inadvisable to permit more than one actor at a time to attempt this. "Taking stage," however, sometimes merely means an actor's giving himself more freedom of movement.

"Take It Away" The stage manager's customary order when he wishes to "strike" the scene.

Teaser The front border that masks the first border lights and the ceiling or flies.

Throw It Away To toss off a speech without stress. Useful in connection with speeches that are of a commentary character and require no reply. The effect of an aside may sometimes be achieved in this manner.

Tormentor 1. A fixed wing (or curtain) on each side of the stage directly behind the proscenium arch and projecting out sufficiently far to hide from the audience the front end

of the side wall, or the edge of the front side wing of a setting, when the latter comes entirely within the opening of the proscenium. 2. The chap who insists on going over his lines with you just before you make your entrance.

Traveler The lateral overhead pipe used to suspend baby spotlights particularly placed for special lighting effects. Also the rings and track on which a draw curtain is operated.

Trouper A term of endearment and praise between fellow actors. A "good trouper" is a willing performer who can put up with all the vicissitudes of the stage without complaint. Kipling described him in his poem "If."

Up Away from the audience.

Upstage At the rear of the stage set. In relation to another actor it means being further away from the footlights thus necessitating his turning his back on the audience when he speaks. Hence "upstage," meaning an attitude of superiority.

Walk-on A minor part without lines. The fate of unskilled husbands and timid wives.

Warning A preliminary cue for an entrance or an offstage effect. It should be plainly marked on the prompter's script.

Wing 1. The space on either side of the stage set. 2. A flat used to mask on the sides of a stage when the set is not completely enclosed. 3. *v.* To stagger through a part on short study by the use of paraphrase and imagination. A stock-company phrase, where the exigencies of frequent changes of bill necessitate many an actor's "winging" his part.

Part II

NOTES FOR THE DIRECTOR, AS APPLIED TO *GEORGE*, A ONE-ACT PLAY

The following one-act farce is presented here primarily as a means of illustrating various points for a director to keep in mind when he is rehearsing a play. It is designed essentially to suggest means of getting added values out of situations by attention to posture, inflection, and—most of all—timing. Some of the directions merely exemplify principles covered in the preceding pages, but many of them consist of refinements of this material designed to add polish to the performance.

The reader is advised to read through the play on the right-hand pages before tackling the directors' notes. It is the author's belief that a careful observance of the left-page advice will then convey a better conception of the mechanics of acting than many pages of precept and admonition.

V.H.C.

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GEORGE

A Farce in One Act

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ELIZABETH.

SUE, her friend.

PHILIP, her husband.

GEORGE, of Marblehead.

SCENE: A summer house on Cape Cod.

TIME: The present.

NOTES FOR THE DIRECTOR

This is a farce. As such it should be played downstage, with bright lights and as rapidly as may be. Your set is not confining and may be readjusted to suit the exigencies of any particular stage. Simply be sure that you have room enough to shift your characters about without interference, and use as shallow a stage as you can. The picture of George, being the keynote of the play, must be an actual enlargement of a photograph of the man playing the part. Do not try to fake this. The audience must see the picture. Be careful that your mirror (stage L.) does not pick up the foot-lights. A small block of wood tacked to the back of the mirror will usually prevent this.

Sue's entrance must be brisk and smiling, and her first speech should go up in scale; she sets a key for the play at the very beginning.

Be careful that Elizabeth really sounds to the audience as though she were some distance away. All too often in small theaters off-stage voices sound as if they came right out of

GEORGE

SCENE: *The living room of a modest country house somewhere on Cape Cod. It is summer time, and the furnishings are simple. A window, up right, is open. Directly center, up stage, is a fireplace with a mantel. To the left of that is a table with a decanter, siphon and glasses. On either side, upstage, are arches or open doors, the one on the right leading to the front hall, the one on the left to the living quarters of the house. Downstage left is a group of a low table and two chairs (the one toward the center of the stage must have arms). On the right is another armchair and on the extreme right is a table with a huge photograph of a man upon it. On about the middle of the left wall is a small mirror. Ash trays are on the tables and the mantel. On a spare chair somewhere upstage is a sofa pillow. Lamps, pictures, etc., to furnish, but there must be no high objects on the table down left. There is a telephone upstage right of center. As the curtain rises SUE enters from the hallway (R). She is a pretty, fresh-looking, forthright girl, in her late twenties, with a sense of humor and a disarming candor. Finding no one, she calls:*

SUE

Elizabeth! Oh, Elizabeth! Shall I come up?

ELIZABETH

(*Off stage*) No, I'll be right down!

(*SUE looks about room and sees the huge picture of GEORGE on the table R. She is obviously surprised and*

the fireplace. Take a moment just before dress rehearsal to assign her to a fixed spot for this speech.

Elizabeth speaks from the doorway. Sue doesn't turn. The focus is entirely on the picture of George. Elizabeth comes down on her second speech. Her concentration must continue to be on the picture. When she goes over to Sue she must not get too close or she'll have to retreat when Sue swings about. Be sure your actors always give each other "playing room."

Elizabeth takes a long breath before the words "My George." This both interprets and emphasizes them.

goes over to examine it more closely. ELIZABETH enters down the stairs. She is in the middle thirties, attractive in a trifle obvious manner, foolish in a harmless way, yet possessing definite charm. She just escapes being gushing, but her enthusiasm is simply a frank emphasizing of her rather childish emotions. Everybody laughs at her and likes her. She is pleased when she sees SUE admiring the picture)

ELIZABETH

(In a tender voice) Isn't he splendid?

SUE

(Without turning) Quite splendid. Who is he?

ELIZABETH

(Ardently) His name's George!

SUE

Just George?

ELIZABETH

(A little hurt) Why, yes. What's the matter with that?

SUE

(Turning) Well, I mean—no last name or anything?

ELIZABETH

(Smiling again) Why, of course, silly—it's Gravicombe.

SUE

(Turning back to picture) What an unusual name!

ELIZABETH

(Crossing over to look over SUE's shoulder) Oh, he is unusual—my George.

Sue must definitely register surprise. The eyebrows will help.

Sue breaks this speech into two parts. The "Oh, I see" is slow and implies that she doesn't see at all; the rest is spoken rapidly in mock inquiry. The more variety in tone and tempo the better.

Elizabeth is excited and full of conversation. This should be reflected in her posture. She sits upright and forward in her chair.

This is a difficult speech, being really two separate speeches dovetailed together. It will heighten the comedy effect if she alternates her tone to suit first the "Philip in Bar Harbor" motif and then the "George in Marblehead" theme.

Sue's crossing and sitting left is simply for the sake of variety. If she entered right and sat right and later went out right, and Elizabeth entered left and sat left and went out left, although probably perfectly natural in life the effect on the stage would be cramped and military.

SUE

(Swinging about) Your George?

ELIZABETH

Yes. My George. *(She sighs happily)*

SUE

Oh, I see. You still have a Philip, too, haven't you?

ELIZABETH

Oh, yes. But I've always had my Philip. *(She sits R.)*

SUE

(Crossing to table L. for a cigarette) How long have you had your George?

ELIZABETH

It's been almost three weeks now. I met him at Marblehead during race week. Oh, Sue, he is so handsome—you know the week Phil had to go up to Bar Harbor to see that awful Carver woman about her house—imagine her wanting a porte-cochere—but he has gorgeous manners, and such an air of distinction. I don't think she's paid for it yet, either. You're going to meet him.

SUE

(Sitting left) Right now?

ELIZABETH

(Almost coy) No—no—but very soon—today. Oh, I hope the train isn't late.

SUE

(A little puzzled) He's coming down here?

Sue's posture is in contrast to that of Elizabeth. She should be completely at ease. Her cigarette may help her. Remember, however, that it's dangerous to let her cross her legs, however natural the impulse.

If Elizabeth has a tendency to flutter physically let her lock her fingers in a handkerchief, which she holds in her lap.

ELIZABETH

This afternoon.

SUE

To meet your Philip?

ELIZABETH

Yes. Oh, I do hope he likes him!

SUE

Oh, he will—who could help liking Phil?

ELIZABETH

No, no! I mean I hope Phil likes George. (*Anxiously*)
It's awfully important that he should, don't you think?

SUE

As what?

ELIZABETH

What do you mean—"as what?"

SUE

Well, as what is it important that Phil likes him? As
your boy friend or his?

ELIZABETH

(*Reproachfully*) Oh, Sue! As my fiancé, of course!

SUE

Oh! But you didn't tell me! You're going to *marry* your
George?

ELIZABETH

(*A little hurt*) Of course! You don't think I'd—I'd—do
anything else, do you?

A pause after "things like that." Then the last sentence brightly with a little explanatory, half-apologetic smile.

Sue nods toward the photograph as she speaks, sympathetically. The audience should get the impression that Sue has her tongue in her cheek, but Elizabeth must not get it.

Here is an excellent example of a speech that can gain comedy effect by being "thrown away." Be careful, however, that it is audible and distinct, even though it gives the appearance of carelessness.

Elizabeth's "What?" serves to point and emphasizes Sue's speech. The cue must be picked up very rapidly, and if there's any laugh it is Elizabeth's job to hold it.

SUE

What about your present husband? You're not contemplating bigamy, are you?

ELIZABETH

Oh, Phil's awfully nice about it—you know he's never wanted to stand in the way of my happiness. He's awfully big about things like that. But he did want to see George.

SUE

In the flesh, you mean?

ELIZABETH

Oh, yes, meet him and talk things over. I do hope Phil approves of him. (*Conscientiously*) If Phil was unfavorably impressed it would make a big difference to me.

SUE

What did he think of the campaign poster?

ELIZABETH

What?—Oh, he liked it! He said he was surprised how intelligent George looked.

SUE

What did he say when you told him you'd asked George down?

ELIZABETH

(*Hesitating*) Well, to tell the truth—I haven't told him.

SUE

(*Really surprised*) Phil doesn't know that your George is coming down here today?

Keep the scene going. Brightly. Pick up cues. Elizabeth speaks rapidly with little staccato pauses to break the rhythm and let the echoes die. Be sure she varies her tone, or she'll tire out the audience.

We're a little tired of their positions. Sue shifts simply to rest the eye of the audience. Her movement is leisurely; she may, during the process of extinguishing her cigarette, say part of her "George in general" speech with her back to the audience.

ELIZABETH

No. I thought it might be better if they just met sort of casually.

SUE

Oh, I see. You feel that no importance should be attached to it.

ELIZABETH

(*Quickly*) Yes.—*No!* Oh, Phil and I have talked about George. We've often talked about him in general—other Georges, I mean—and we've talked about this George too, but I didn't tell him he was coming down this week. When he gets here we can all sit down and have a sensible discussion, and we'll all just say what we think. Of course, Phil knows how I feel about him.

SUE

Yes, I should think he would after eight years. (*She goes up to mantel and puts out cigarette*)

ELIZABETH

No, no—how I feel about *George*.

SUE

(*From mantel*) George in general, or George in particular?

ELIZABETH

(*A little hurt*) This George.

SUE

Well, I didn't know. You've been sort of vague with your Georges. Then you've told Phil definitely that you want to marry this George—have you?

Sue comes down a step or two. Mock horror.

Elizabeth's interruption should really be cued by the word "not." It is better to have her cut into the speech rather than leave the end of it hanging in air. Nothing is more stilted than a broken speech in which the speaker simply stops and the so-called interruption follows. It isn't a bad idea to teach your actors to go right ahead ad lib until they are actually cut in upon. In this case, however, that would be hard—only two words can very well be added, and perhaps it were as well to leave these to the imagination of the audience.

We have now succeeded in reversing the positions of Sue and Elizabeth without, we hope, being too obvious about it.

ELIZABETH

(*Hesitating*) Well—yes! In a way.

SUE

(*Nodding*) Just casually, I suppose.

ELIZABETH

(*A trifle piqued*) Not at all. We discussed it. Philip says he will release me. That is if George will do the right thing by me.

SUE

Gracious! Has he done the wrong thing by you? Elizabeth—you're *not* about to become——

ELIZABETH

(*Rising—indignantly*) Certainly not! I didn't mean that at all. I mean if George appears to be able to care for me in a suitable manner.

SUE

Is he rich?

ELIZABETH

He's very well off. (*She crosses L., about to get cigarette*)

SUE

But doesn't know it?

ELIZABETH

(*Turning abruptly*) What do you mean?

SUE

Oh, nothing. I was thinking about Phil. (*She saunters down R. and sits*) Is George really nicer?

Elizabeth uses the arm both for the sake of variety and because she can enthuse better in that position.

A quick intake of breath and sigh between the two "yes's" will help. Not only will it register with the audience, but it will help put the performer into the mood of the part.

Elizabeth lets her eyes rest on a point just short of the footlights. She must play this fairly full-face to get the best effect.

During all this scene Sue must play up to Elizabeth. Don't let her relax in her enjoyment. She must by her own interest keep that of the audience alive, and by giving the appearance of being herself ready to laugh, engender a similar sensation in them.

Even though Elizabeth does most of the talking, this must give the appearance of a busy dialogue.

ELIZABETH

(*Warm again*) Oh, Sue, he's just the nicest man you ever saw, and he has the most beautiful voice. (*She sits on arm of chair L.*)

SUE

Did he sing to you?

ELIZABETH

(*Rapturously*) Yes—yes! Of course, there were a lot of other people there, at the time, but I felt he was singing just to me.

SUE

(*Nodding*) And you loved it?

ELIZABETH

I was crazy about him the minute I laid eyes on him. He brought me an ice, lemon, I think, or perhaps it was pineapple. (*She is lost in happy memory of the event*)

SUE

(*Bringing her back*) Then what happened?

ELIZABETH

Oh! Well, it was Saturday night after the dance. We went for a sail together. It was a heavenly night. And then—well, I don't remember exactly how it happened—we just got to talking together——

SUE

(*In mock sympathy*) And then you just got to saying nothing together—I know.

ELIZABETH

And then before I knew it—well it *was* sort of chilly out on the water, and George threw the sleeve of his polo coat around my neck.

Elizabeth gives equal value to the two statements, and both are delivered in the rapturous tones of ecstatic reminiscence.

For comedy effect this speech should be in three distinct parts. And Sue must do a bit of active thinking between each part. It is an excellent example of the desirability of letting the speech grow out of the thought. The whole thing loses point and effectiveness if it is strung together.

SUE

With his arm in it?

ELIZABETH

Well, yes, I found it was—but—well, you know how those things happen, and I was simply bowled off my feet. I just can't explain it. You know how strait-laced I am, Sue—but somehow when George put his arm around me I didn't seem to care a bit, and then while I was trying to concentrate on Phil he kissed me—oh, shall I ever forget it! (*She pauses an instant in tumultuous remembrance*)—and there was nothing more we could do about it then.

SUE

(*Practical as ever*) No, not out on a sailboat.

ELIZABETH

No, we just lay in each other's arms and talked about the future. I had on my yellow evening dress with the violets.

SUE

What did he say about Phil?

ELIZABETH

(*A shade embarrassed*) Well, as a matter of fact, I—I didn't tell him about Phil. (*She gets cigarette from table L.*)

SUE

What? You discussed the future, but you didn't mention Phil? It must have been a skillful conversation.

ELIZABETH

Somehow, I just couldn't—it was all so lovely. (*Quickly*)

This is simply another chance to give the illusion of action by movement. It also serves to draw attention again to the picture, which must bulk large in the mind of the audience.

Of course I *did refer* to Phil—I spoke of him as a man on whose advice I relied very much. I just carelessly brought his name into the conversation several times.

SUE

You're great on this casual stuff, aren't you?

ELIZABETH

Well, I'm trying to tell you that I *did* tell George I wanted to talk it over with Phil before I gave him his answer.

SUE

(*Quickly*) He really did ask you to marry him, did he?

ELIZABETH

(*Hurt*) Of course he did! You didn't think I asked him, did you?

SUE

Well, I thought you might have let the idea drop—just casually, of course.

ELIZABETH

Sue, you're hateful! He told me he loved me, twice. The second time, I heard him distinctly. And it was then I told him if he came down here this week-end I would give him his answer.

SUE

(*Rising and picking up the picture*) And he's coming?

ELIZABETH

(*Going over to her*) Of course, he's coming.

SUE

But he doesn't know you're married or anything?

Sue crosses in front of Elizabeth and lets her speech carry her up center. Elizabeth follows her a step.

Sue's position on the mantel (if it admits of it) is with her back to it and her elbows upon it. The pose is characteristic, and, for the time being at least, will save her any worry about what she is to do with her hands.

ELIZABETH

What do you mean—"or anything"?

SUE

Nothing. I mean he's simply going to think Phil's a boarder or something?

ELIZABETH

What do you mean—"or something"? I do wish you'd stop putting these confusing tags on your sentences.

SUE

(Replacing picture) Sounds like a nice party.

ELIZABETH

(Brightening again) That's the reason I wanted you to come to dinner. You will, won't you? It will be such a help.

SUE

Just where do I fit in? Am I to catch Phil as he's lopped off, or am I simply to act as a flattering contrast for you in front of your boy-friend. I don't mind at all, but I would like to know beforehand whether I'm cast for a siren or a simpleton.

ELIZABETH

Oh, neither, Sue dear. I just want somebody else here to take the tension off. *(Anxiously)* Don't you think it's a good idea?

SUE

Just dandy. I wouldn't miss it for the world. Do you think they'll throw things?

If the young lady playing Sue doesn't naturally smoke—ask her to prompt, or help with the costumes, or be an usher. We all know the non-inhaling, two-finger, palm-to-the-front variety. It won't do here.

It's a new thought, and she has time to get set before she says the second half. Be sure she thinks it first.

Her movement must indicate her nervous state. She doesn't really look out—she just nervously reacts to the idea of the window.

Elizabeth comes down to Sue at the end of this speech, pleading.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Sue, of course there won't be any scene.

SUE

(*Crossing L.—again for a cigarette*) Well, don't tell them who they are before I get here, will you? I'd hate to miss the moment when you introduce Phil as your brother.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to leave the two of them together, and I'm sure it will all come out in the conversation.

SUE

Yes, I should think it might. (*She sits*) What time do you expect him?

ELIZABETH

He ought to get in on the 5:36. Gracious, it must be nearly that now. (*She goes up to window R.*) Oh dear, you know, Sue darling, I'm beginning to feel kind of nervous.

SUE

I don't blame you a bit. I'm sort of nervous myself.

ELIZABETH

(*Fluttering about*) When Phil comes in I'm just going to make some sort of excuse to get out for a while. I thought I wouldn't be here when George arrives. Please back me up.

SUE

Of course. By the way, what are you supposed to be—a widow or a virgin?

"I don't know" is pitched a whole octave below the key in which Elizabeth has been speaking. It increases the comedy effect—and adds variety to the scene. A little apologetic giggle can lift it again—and "George never asked" is back in the same gushing enthusiasm as in the earlier part of the scene.

On Philip's entrance we have the stage set for him. Elizabeth has her back to him and her turn on Sue's speech focuses attention on the door. Both women are stage left, and Phil's entrance up right gives him a broad half of the stage to himself. If either Elizabeth or Sue were stage right the entrance would be partially masked and would lose emphasis and effectiveness.

Phil must stop, or the action would be crowded.

Elizabeth's cross is to let Phil take the center of the stage.

ELIZABETH

(Stopping short) I don't know. I don't think he thought I was—that is, I guess he must have thought I was a widow. George never asked.

SUE

George doesn't seem to be much of a talker, does he?

ELIZABETH

George is divine.

SUE

I'm getting more anxious to meet him every minute. Instead here's Philip.

(PHILIP enters from R. He's a nice chap in the middle thirties, who appreciates ELIZABETH's virtues and uses an aggressive wit and a somewhat roving eye as antidotes for her shortcomings.)

PHILIP

(Breezily) Hello, Sue. Hello, my dear. Water's fine.

ELIZABETH

(Reproachfully) Oh, *Phil*, you haven't been for a swim?

PHILIP

(Stopped in his tracks) Yes, I have. Why not?

ELIZABETH

You know perfectly well people don't swim here in the afternoon. *(She crosses R. and readjusts GEORGE's picture)*

PHILIP

(Coming down C.) Oh, yes they do. I met one swell fel-

This is almost over her shoulder.

Don't let Sue wait for "Philip!" as a cue. She must speak almost simultaneously with Elizabeth at the end of Phil's speech, or the scene will drag.

low who told me how to make a cocktail with currant jelly.

ELIZABETH

What was his name?

PHILIP

Edgar, I think. He's staying up at Pembroke Hall.

ELIZABETH

Oh, really? That's odd—I don't remember meeting him.

PHILIP

You wouldn't. He works in the pantry.

ELIZABETH

(*Shocked*) Philip!

SUE

Any attractive kitchen maids, Phil?

PHILIP

(*Grinning*) No—worse luck.

ELIZABETH

Where did you leave your bathing suit?

PHILIP

Upstairs in my closet.

ELIZABETH

Phil! Have you no sense at all?

PHILIP

It's not wet; it's been there all afternoon.

ELIZABETH

Philip! You *didn't* go in without anything on?

Elizabeth has some pantomime to do to carry her effectively into her chair. Don't let her throw her hands into the air—or do a palms-to-the-front “Lan’ sakes!” gesture. She must be really vexed. But it is good business to let the sight of George’s picture, which happens to come into her line of vision as she sits, elicit a momentary smile out of her before she returns to a sterner expression.

PHILIP

Oh, it was quite all right. The only person I ran into was Mrs. Keith-Kimball.

ELIZABETH

(*Horried*) Oh, Phil! Not Mrs. Keith-Kimball? Did she see you?

PHILIP

Yes, I'm afraid so—you know I never could swim under water—I guess everything but my head was above the surface, but I did contrive to keep that under. I doubt very much if she recognized me. (ELIZABETH *sits, down R.*)

SUE

Was your friend the butler present at the time, Phil?

PHILIP

No. He hadn't arrived as yet. If he had, Mrs. Keith-Kimball would have had no eyes for me—even in my somewhat extraordinary position. Edgar's a devil of a fellow in a bathing suit.

ELIZABETH

Oh, *he* had a bathing suit, did he?

PHILIP

Yes, two-piece. He offered to share it with me, but we matched for choice and I got the top half, so I didn't bother.

ELIZABETH

Now, really—Philip.

Be sure he makes the natural turn. As a rule turns should be made so as to show as little as possible of the actor's back to the audience.

It is better to have bottled water than a siphon. The latter is dangerous as it is liable to act explosively. Furthermore your actors are going to have to consume their drinks, and still water is safer than sparkling—for obvious reasons.

She rises but stands there. If she moves she is liable to mask Phil, who must still keep the middle position. Sue's rise is merely to punctuate her interruption.

PHILIP

(*Turning up to table L.*) Well, in any case, the water was swell. And there's absolutely nothing better for building up an appreciation of a little scotch-and-soda. Have a spot?

ELIZABETH

No, thanks.

SUE

Just a wee one.

(*PHILIP mixes drinks*)

ELIZABETH

(*Rising*) Is there plenty there, Phil? And how about cigars?

PHILIP

(*Turning*) Gosh! Has Sue taken to cigars?

ELIZABETH

No, of course not! I was thinking of—that is, I just wanted to be sure there were plenty.

PHILIP

Well, there are more than I want.

ELIZABETH

Yes, I know, but——

(*PHILIP looks puzzled*)

SUE

(*Rising—quickly*) If you're coming with me, Elizabeth, you'd better hurry along.

PHILIP

Where are you going?

Phil can come down sooner if he has his drinks mixed in time. Be careful, however, that he doesn't slight that operation in order to make connections. The actor who starts to light a pipe or pour a drink, etc., and then leaves the job incomplete because his stage directions call for a movement across stage before he's finished is certain to appear amateurish. If the business cannot be completed (or convincingly faked) without obvious hurry, it had better be omitted.

Sue crosses to Elizabeth and virtually shoves her in the direction of the door up left. Both her cross and that of Elizabeth are made below Phil, who follows in behind only as far as the table, up L.

SUE

We're going to look for Edgar.

ELIZABETH

Why, Sue! Of course, Philip, we never had any such idea! I'm just going to stop over at Sue's for a few minutes—she's coming back to dinner.

PHILIP

(*Down C.*) Swell. Why don't I try to get hold of Jimmy Crawford and we'll have some bridge.

ELIZABETH

(*Quickly*) NO!—don't do that!

PHILIP

Why not? He plays pretty well.

ELIZABETH

Well—I—oh, I don't feel like playing bridge.

PHILIP

Well, we'll ask him to dinner anyway.

ELIZABETH

(*Petulantly*) I don't want him for dinner.

PHILIP

Oh, all right, my dear, then we'll get—

ELIZABETH

Nor anyone else!

SUE

(*Quickly*) Elizabeth, I'm leaving. Hurry up! It'll be dinner time before we get started if you don't watch out.

Elizabeth speaks as she crosses. Don't let her say her line and then go rattling across the stage while the others—and the audience—wait. If she had a more important exit speech, she could hold the last part of it until she reached the doorway and her exit would perhaps be more effective, but in this instance the object is simply to bustle her off, and the context admits of no bid for a hand.

The audience must be apprised of Sue's intention before she makes this speech. A look toward the picture, the registering of the idea, and a covert glance toward Phil before she speaks will assist greatly in pointing her line.

Phil starts to drink and gets the afterthought that George sings. He stops his swallow in the middle, throws out the two words, and then goes back to his drink. It's hokum but it's good comedy, and gives particular emphasis to the singing motif, which is subsequently made good use of.

ELIZABETH

All right—I won't be but a minute.

(She goes upstairs—PHILIP follows up as far as the table)

PHILIP

(Up L.) By dinner time we'll be moving heaven and earth to find a fourth.

SUE

(She sits on arm of chair R.) Maybe not. *(She nods toward the large photograph)* Who's that? Relative of yours?

PHILIP

(Coming down C.) Not exactly. That's George. Don't tell me you haven't heard of George?

SUE

Vaguely. What's his last name?

PHILIP

I'm damned if I know. *(He is somewhat surprised to realize it)* I don't think Elizabeth told me. She thinks of him only as George. George, the Marblehead boy—a silent, powerful chap, who just *does* things to you!

SUE

Does he do things to you, too?

PHILIP

I don't think so. I've never seen him. *(Drinks)* He sings. *(Drinks)*

SUE

(Looking down her nose) Elizabeth loves singing.

Sue must enjoy herself. The success of this scene depends upon her ability to communicate to the audience the pleasure she gets out of having fun with Phil in the light of her recent conversation. It is always "good theater" to have the audience "in" on something of which one or more of the actors is ignorant. From now on, this play is based very largely on this principle.

Be sure Phil looks out the door before making this speech. He must really see Elizabeth. The audience won't stand for mental telepathy on the stage, and the occasional wireless pick-up is fatal. Whatever we may think of "realism" on the stage, the effect of reality is essential.

PHILIP

Yes. This birdie appears to be a sort of Lorelei in trousers.

SUE

Doesn't sound attractive. (*She rises and eyes the picture*)
Yet he *looks* rather nice.

PHILIP

I'll bet he's a tenor. (*He puts his glass on mantel*)

SUE

(*Leaning against table R.*) Phil! I do believe you're jealous!

PHILIP

Don't be crazy!

SUE

Is Elizabeth pretty intense about him?

PHILIP

There seems to be a strong undercurrent of favorable feeling.

SUE

And what of George? Does *he*—

PHILIP

(*Glancing out L.*) Here comes Elizabeth. I dare say you'll get plenty of George during the next half hour. I don't envy you.

SUE

Don't you worry about me.

(*ELIZABETH enters hurriedly from L. and crosses in front of PHIL*)

Elizabeth starts speaking the instant she enters. She goes straight to Sue. Phil can get some effect out of his surprise as she bustles past. Don't let him mug it, but one raised eyebrow might help.

Watch that turn. It must be to the left. To the right might be a little shorter and more natural, but it will look awkward to the audience.

Sue turns Elizabeth so that she can take her by the left arm and swing her around and above her and out right, ahead of her. Elizabeth's exit speech is almost sugary, but it is made from the doorway straight through Sue, who continues to push her out. There is a comedy effect in Elizabeth's last-minute effort to get in the conjugal touch with Phil prior to the arrival of George.

During all this pantomime Phil must be thinking in character. His thoughts will time his actions, which otherwise, if learned by rote, may be too fast to get over or too slow to hold interest.

The soliloquy—even three words—is a tough assignment for any actor. In real life most of the people who talk to themselves do so in restricted spaces patrolled by men in white suits and conductors' hats. On the stage the practice

ELIZABETH

(*Excitedly*) Come, dear, hurry up—I just heard the train whistle.

PHILIP

(*Going down L.*) Train whistle?—You're not going on the train, are you?

ELIZABETH

(*Turning C.*) Oh, no! I just meant it must be late!

PHILIP

It whistles whether it's late or not. What do *you* care?

SUE

(*Taking ELIZABETH by the arm and pushing her ahead of her toward door R.*) Philip, you're wasting our time. I'll see you at dinner. Good-bye.

ELIZABETH

Good-bye, Phil.

PHILIP

Good-bye, my dear.

(*ELIZABETH and SUE go out. PHILIP pours himself another highball and goes over and gravely salutes the picture of GEORGE. After drinking the picture's health, he examines it critically. He then crosses to the mirror L. and looks carefully at his own countenance. He finally goes back to the table R. and gets George's picture and brings it back to the mirror so that he can compare the two faces more closely. Finally he clears his throat and attempts to sing:*)

is not thought well of. Here, however, Philip at least has the semblance of a companion in the mirror. It is better to have him address his own reflection when he speaks.

When he puts down the photograph he must place it so that it faces the audience.

George's business with the hat should be sparingly used, but it is designed to give the audience some idea of his character even before he speaks. George is but a stumbling Lothario, and the hesitating, indecisive manipulation of the hat is illuminating. Remember that each gesture must be broad, definite and clean cut.

Philip gives George a few seconds for this business before making his entrance.

George speaks more slowly and preferably in a lower key than Phil. The script doesn't call for it, but there's no harm in letting George be a trifle English.

I've been working on the railroad! (*He stops abruptly and shakes his head*)

No! Decidedly—no!

(*The doorbell rings. PHILIP puts the picture back on the table and goes to answer it. After a brief interval GEORGE—an agreeable, slightly nervous and reserved man of considerable size—enters. He has a suitcase in his left hand and a hat in his right. He sets down the case up R. of C. and nervously looks for a resting place for his hat, making several incomplete gestures with it*)

PHILIP

(*Returning*) I'm sorry to say you just missed her.

GEORGE

Oh, that's all right. I suppose I can wait?

PHILIP

Absolutely. I don't think she'll be so very long. Won't you sit down, Mr. — (*He pauses inquiringly*)

GEORGE

Gravicombe.

(*He starts to sit and again is embarrassed by his hat.*

PHILIP *relieves him of it*)

Thanks. (*He sits stiffly, L. of C.*)

PHILIP

(*Tossing the hat on nearest table*) Gravicombe. Unusual name.

GEORGE

Yes.

Philip remains standing. George must not look at him. Philip keeps looking back at George, trying to locate him—if George encounters the gaze the point is lost. For comedy effect Phil should do his puzzled thinking while looking toward the right, and when he looks back at George to refresh his memory of his features, it should be a sudden jerk, a fixed look, and a snap back to the business of looking off right. Needless to say, if he has failed to place the photograph so that it is facing the audience rather than him, the comedy of the scene is pretty much lost.

Get George set on a certain key and inflection for "I beg your pardon?" He says it frequently, and it lends a comedy effect if each time the sound is identical.

Phil's seating himself terminates the "trying-to-remember" business and introduces a new thought.

PHILIP

(Looking at him carefully) Gravicombe. No, I don't know it. But I think I've met *you* somewhere before.

GEORGE

(Politely) Yes?

PHILIP

You don't belong to the Curfew Club, do you?

GEORGE

(Not encouraging the conversation) No.

PHILIP

How about the Blue Bison?

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

PHILIP

No? Well, maybe we've met at the Coliseum.

GEORGE

I'm afraid not. Sorry.

PHILIP

Don't be sorry. Dull spot, the Coliseum. *(He sits R.)* Well, I could swear I've seen your face somewhere. Tell me—do you live about here? Maybe I've seen you in the water. I'm quite a one for the beaches, myself.

GEORGE

(Briefly) I sail.

PHILIP

Oh, do you? Where do you sail?

George must stop and think before asking. His pause makes his question funny. Otherwise it isn't funny at all. If you don't believe it, try it both ways. This is an excellent example of the value of pause (and facial expression) in making a point.

Phil mustn't touch the picture. It must be left where it is to give George motivation for a cross presently.

Phil can make good use of his hands with this speech. On "George," the right hand goes out toward the picture (No! No!—Palm up and hand open!)—and with "you" out goes the left toward George. Hold it till he speaks again.

GEORGE

Marblehead—usually.

PHILIP

(Quickly) Marblehead! I say, do you know a George Thingamabob up there?

GEORGE

(Slowly) What was that last name?

PHILIP

Oh, I don't think I know it. He sails, though—big, impressive sort of chap—quite a lad with the ladies and all that!

GEORGE

(After due deliberation) There are several Georges.

PHILIP

Oh, I know! But you couldn't miss this one. Here—I'll show you—here's his picture!

(He gets up and turns to the picture, and is overcome by the sudden recognition of GEORGE's identity)

Oh, I'm awfully sorry—it's—that is—he's you!

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

PHILIP

(Explaining) George is you.

GEORGE

(With dignity) My name is George—George Gravi-combe.

George's cross must be in character, deliberate, ponderous, and not very quick. His "yes" is merely confirmative and wholly unemotional.

Phil should take his time on this one. The whole speech depends upon a sense of timing. A slight pause after "yes," and perhaps it would help if he repeated "Didn't she."

Here again Phil must think it and time it. What he really thinks is "What [do you mean?] Oh [I see] Yes [she is]." He must take time to think all three thoughts. If he thinks them his face will express them. That will help the audience. Do as much work for them as you can. They paid for their seats.

PHILIP

Yes, I know now. And this is your picture.

(GEORGE crosses over R., examines the picture gravely, and nods)

GEORGE

Yes.

PHILIP

(Brightly) Well, I'm Philip.

(He is now stage C. and L. of GEORGE)

GEORGE

(Unemotionally) Philip. A relative of Mrs. Coburn's?

PHILIP

(After a minute's startled hesitation) Yes, by marriage. Didn't she mention having a relative named Philip?

GEORGE

No, I don't recall that she did. As a matter of fact, I don't really know Mrs. Coburn very well. Splendid woman!

PHILIP

What? Oh! Yes. (Pause) Have a cigar?

GEORGE

No thanks.

PHILIP

(Offering his case) Cigarette?

GEORGE

Thanks. (He takes one)

Have George lift the latter part of this speech. It is his first sign of animation. It will help Phil's reaction.

As before, it is essential that Phil take time to make the highballs properly. George can fill by looking around the room (it's the first time he's been there), and he might look a bit askance at his own picture. It will hold.

The chief reason George sits right is because he was sitting left before.

PHILIP

How about a little scotch?

GEORGE

Just a spot—if you think it's all right.

PHILIP

(Somewhat surprised) I think it's excellent!

GEORGE

I mean if you think it's all right to help ourselves in Mrs. Coburn's absence.

PHILIP

What! Oh! Oh, yes, I think it will be all right. She lets me have the run of the house.

(He pours the highballs and, handing one to GEORGE, looks quizzically at him)

Bit of a stickler for form, aren't you, George?

GEORGE

(Embarrassed) Well, perhaps, a trifle. *(He sits R.)* I do have a certain respect for rights and privileges and all that sort of thing.

PHILIP

This is going to be a tough evening for you, George. By the way, do you play bridge?

GEORGE

After a fashion.

There should be a contrast in the manner of sitting. George is meticulous and precise. Phil is careless and comfortable. Action is frequently as interpretative of character as speech.

PHILIP

What fashion?

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

PHILIP

(*Sitting L.*) That's the way I play too. The "Awfully sorry, old dear!" method. Nothing makes Elizabeth madder, though, than to admit you're wrong before she gets a chance to tell you why.

GEORGE

You seem to know Mrs. Coburn rather well. What sort of a woman is she? I've been sort of wondering about her.

PHILIP

Yes, I can understand that. But, see here, do you think I ought to discuss the personality of my—my relative—with a stranger? That is (*with a glance toward the picture*)—a comparative stranger?

GEORGE

I don't see why not. I'm an ardent admirer of Mrs. Coburn.

PHILIP

Um. Well, I suppose I might give you a little sketch of Elizabeth, if you like. Where shall I begin?

GEORGE

Oh, anywhere at all.

Philip must enjoy this scene. It will gain effectiveness if George plays it pretty well front, enabling Philip to look at him without betraying the fact that he is smiling. Also George's face, deadly serious, may be funny. He must, of course, turn to Phil when it is natural for him to do so, but "Oh, very lovely" and "Too beautiful eyes" can be played dead front and a little emotion in the voice will help.

Again contrast is your objective. Contrast, and therefore variety, in tempo, tone, manner, and movement is what keeps the audience awake.

A pause after "Let me see" while Phil actually gets the inspiration about the singing. If the audience sees his face light up with the idea they will be more alert for it.

PHILIP

Well, she has lovely hair.

GEORGE

Oh, very lovely.

PHILIP

And I think she has rather beautiful eyes.

GEORGE

Too beautiful eyes.

PHILIP

(*Nodding*) That's right—and *one* rather nice nose.

GEORGE

Yes, but my dear fellow—I know all that—I know as much about her appearance as you do.

PHILIP

I hope not.

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

PHILIP

I should think you would—but let's get on. I take it you're more interested in her personal characteristics.

GEORGE

Yes, her tastes and all that sort of thing.

PHILIP

Well, let me see; she has one somewhat extraordinary prejudice.

George's "What's that" is a little faster than usual, and his next speech is a startled exclamation. If he has established his lethargic character, the very fact that he loses some of his dignity has humor in it. It is always funny to see the silk hat slip.

Phil's line is a good one to "throw away."

Philip watches him. It would, of course, be normal for him to look straight at George, but the useful stage artifice is for him to face more or less front and throw only his eyes in George's direction. It is surprising how clearly the whites of an actor's eyes show to the audience. The sidelong glance registers every time.

If George can manage a shudder with this speech it will help. Just a sudden forward hunch of the shoulders accompanied by a frown will do it. Don't let him try to simulate a wet dog.

GEORGE

What's that?

PHILIP

She simply can't stand listening to a man sing.

GEORGE

(*Startled*) Oh, I say! Are you sure?

PHILIP

Absolutely. She always insists upon my shutting the bathroom door.

GEORGE

Do you sing well?

PHILIP

Not very. But that doesn't matter. She just doesn't like men who sing.

GEORGE

That's very surprising.

(*He studies the idea for a minute, while PHILIP watches him. He is struck with a thought*)

I say—what was that you said about the bathroom door?

PHILIP

I said that she says that I shut it.

GEORGE

But, I mean to say—I should think you would anyway, if you were tubbing and all that!

PHILIP

Oh, she doesn't mind, so long as I don't sing. And it's much cosier with the door open.

There are two reasons for Phil's move: the obvious one that it's about time, and also because it gives him a better chance to watch George's reaction if he is above him.

The scene must begin to pick up speed at this point. Phil simply rattles off his next few speeches.

Remember, however, that speed is largely a matter of picking up cues. Gaps between speeches, unless filled by definite and significant business, always let a scene down. George may continue to speak comparatively deliberately, but he must pick up his cues.

GEORGE

(*Horried*) Cosier! Yes, I should think so!

PHILIP

Besides which *she* usually leaves it open.

GEORGE

Oh, now really!

PHILIP

You've got to be broad-minded about these things, George.

GEORGE

Laxness of that sort is the kind of thing that breaks up families.

PHILIP

(*Rising and replacing glass on table up L.*) Singing in the bathtub doesn't break up any more families than singing in sailboats.

(GEORGE *gives a start*)

Not as many.

GEORGE

(*Recovering himself*) I wasn't referring to singing at all; I was talking about carelessness in one's personal habits.

PHILIP

(*Coming down C.*) Now, my dear fellow—you don't mean to suggest that having a bathe is a careless habit.

GEORGE

(*With dignity*) You mentioned a practice of leaving the door open.

How about his clasping his hands around one knee? It is in character and lends a sort of desirable jauntiness to his manner.

Phil's speech may well be made to the front. If he waits till the question at the end and then turns abruptly to George with it, it will gain force.

A little clearing of the throat after the word "girl" is good business—if it can be done quickly and naturally. It must be brief and almost apologetic, not the kind of admonitory rumble that Father makes when Junior is making bread balls at the other end of the table.

PHILIP

And quite right too. The open-door policy. No hidden ablutions. Open cleanliness openly arrived at.

GEORGE

There *are* proprieties.

PHILIP

All soap and no sex makes George a dull boy—but I was telling you about Elizabeth. How far had I got? I'd told you of her complex about singing. (*He sits on arm of chair L.*)

GEORGE

(*Definitely*) Yes.

PHILIP

Well, let's see. She's a tender-hearted soul and loves anything from a rabbit to a jackass that will put his head in her lap, but she is as changeable as a windy sky: likes a chap one day, and loathes him the next. Haven't you found her so?

GEORGE

Why, no, I can't say I have. You see, I only knew her a day or two, and we really got on awfully well together.

PHILIP

No little flare-ups? No flash of disapproval?

GEORGE

Well, there was just a minute when I was sing—when I was addressing myself closely to another girl—that Elizabeth seemed a touch—well——

Be sure George plants "between you." Don't let him swallow it. "B'tweenya" may not get past Row D and the point of Phil's rejoinder will be lost to a lot of the paying guests.

PHILIP

Jealous! Oh, yes, I know! I remember one week-end when we were at—that is, one time when we each happened to be on the same house party, and I went out after dark for a stroll with another girl—Elizabeth was furious!

GEORGE

Was there anything between you at the time?

PHILIP

Yes, fortunately, a dining-room table and about six guests, but there was no mistaking her emotion.

GEORGE

I didn't quite mean *that*, you know, I meant did she have a right to be upset? Anything of a personal nature between you?

PHILIP

Oh, yes, undoubtedly. Still is. Why?

GEORGE

Well, I was just wondering, if she has a right to be jealous of *you*—what right has she to be jealous of me?

PHILIP

Now that's a nice point!

GEORGE

Well, it's very confusing, and I'm going to the bottom of it. I intend to find out all about Elizabeth.

When an author writes a word like this into a part it is simply an invitation to the actor to make any kind of noise he pleases. If Phil wants to whistle instead, let him. It is a bad idea to try to force an actor to use an exclamation that is unnatural to him. It will always sound forced. Let him try it a couple of times and if he still prefers "Gosh!" or "Baby!" (Well, you get all kinds!) it probably will work out better in the long run to keep him happy. Nothing is worse than to have an actor who, because he is forced to use words he doesn't like the sound of, becomes semi-apologetic about his part.

Any time you want Philip to slide down off the arm into the chair it would be quite all right.

Phil begins to get quite serious in these speeches. Not only should you aim for contrast between characters, but you should also develop variety in each individual player.

PHILIP

Whee!

GEORGE

Well, all the important things, I mean.

PHILIP

What are the important things?

GEORGE

Well, her views on marriage and the bringing up of children, perhaps. What religious beliefs she holds. How she feels about mutual independence.

PHILIP

Here! Let me get you another drink.

GEORGE

No thanks.

PHILIP

Do you believe she'd be honest about all that?

GEORGE

Why not? Plenty of women have very strong ideas on such subjects.

PHILIP

Yes, but it's mostly campaign talk; it's their platform and doesn't mean much after the election. Do you suppose any woman would have the courage to say: "George, I believe in marriage, because it's the only way my neighbors will let you support me and get away with it."

GEORGE

Oh, I say, really!

This speech should be staccato, spoken simply with a slight pause between each question.

When George rises he takes center stage facing Phil.

PHILIP

Well, don't be silly. None of those things are important in married life, anyway.

GEORGE

What, to your mind, *is* important?

PHILIP

Oh, dozens of little things: Does she smoke before breakfast, or in the bathroom? Is she always late intentionally or can't she help it? Does she like food that smells? Does she like to read in bed? How is she about temperatures? Will *she* ever get up and shut the window? Does she know that a flush is higher than a straight, and if she doesn't, does she want to play anyway? That's the kind of thing!

GEORGE

You speak with feeling, as though you'd had experience.

PHILIP

I have. I don't mean to say that they've been unpleasant ones, but I do know what I'm talking about.

GEORGE

You're married, then?

PHILIP

(*Coming to with a jerk*) Er—yes. But I think I knew before.

GEORGE

(*Rising*) Oh, I say: NOW, I know who you are!

When Phil jumps up he goes close to George, facing him. Both are in profile. It is almost Weber and Fields.

Phil gives way on "What!" He is really surprised.

Have Phil hit one of the "no's" harder than the other. Either one is better than an equivalent stress on each. Variety in the texture of a speech is imperative.

If George faces front on the last two words it will help emphasize his sudden embarrassment.

George is the blushing schoolboy.

PHILIP

Good! Tell me! (*He also rises*)

GEORGE

You're the chap on whose opinion Elizabeth relies so much!

PHILIP

What?

GEORGE

Yes, she was telling me all about you; said she always deferred to your judgment.

PHILIP

Oh, no, no! I can't be *that* chap.

GEORGE

There's certainly somebody—she wanted to talk to him about—well, about me.

PHILIP

Well, *that* might have been me.

GEORGE

What makes you think so?

PHILIP

Well, you see, I take it that you recognize the fact that you're "*her* George," don't you?

GEORGE

Well—now—I——

Phil's speech goes up the scale. George can get a laugh out of his "Good God!" He must say it quickly, and right on top of Phil as though it were almost part of the latter's speech.

Philip is himself again. He's being amused at George once more.

This speech should be taken slowly. It's fairly sincere.

The off-stage door slam can best be done by having a husky stage hand put his foot on one end of a "two-by-four" and let the other end slap the bare floor of the stage. One single sharp sound is what you want. Don't let somebody shuffle his feet or rattle a doorknob. It's mussy and unconvincing.

George is a little left of center. Phil is above him and farther left. Both, however, are below the level of Elizabeth's entrance. The audience must see her face as she looks at the others.

PHILIP

Exactly. Well, I'm "her Philip!"

GEORGE

Good God! You mean you are in love with her too!

PHILIP

It's current gossip.

GEORGE

Well, what does she say about it?

PHILIP

She just takes it for granted.

GEORGE

But, hang it all, man, *she* can't love *you*!

PHILIP

About *that* I've been wondering.

(GEORGE starts to say something when there is the noise of the front door. PHILIP speaks quickly.)

There she is now. What did you say your last name was?

GEORGE

Gravicombe, but confound it, man, you don't have to introduce me!

PHILIP

Oh! So I don't!

(They both go up stage a little and face R. anticipating ELIZABETH'S entrance. ELIZABETH enters with an embarrassed flourish)

Elizabeth speaks from just inside the door, commanding the stage. She must be in a position to see George's suitcase in front of her. If she comes down too soon she'll have to look back over her shoulder.

George and Phil must contribute to the scene. Don't let them serve by simply standing and waiting. They must keep still, but if they listen their faces will have value.

Elizabeth must start downstage immediately after speaking to Phil. She can hold her speech to George for an instant so that Phil won't have to scramble over for the bag and back. This must be timed. There mustn't be a wait between the end of her speech and Phil's from the doorway. George remains fixed during the scene.

When Elizabeth goes down right she goes pretty well down. Otherwise George's cross to her will be too short to be significant.

ELIZABETH

George! Oh, I'm *so* glad to see you, now *where* did you drop from?

(*As GEORGE looks a trifle blank and is about to reply she hurries on*)

Now, you simply *must* stay. I *do* hope you have a bag with you. We must put you up.

GEORGE

Well—didn't you—that is, I thought——

ELIZABETH

(*Hurriedly*) Oh, of course, of course. (*Pointing to bag*) There it is. Now, isn't that fine. Philip dear, do take George's bag up to the Blue Room.

PHILIP

(*Blankly*) Which room?

ELIZABETH

(*With a meaning look at him*) The Blue Room, dear.

(*PHILIP crosses above GEORGE, picks up bag and starts L.*)

Did you have a nice trip, George? You look well. (*She goes down R.*)

PHILIP

(*From doorway*) Do you mean the one over the kitchen?

ELIZABETH

(*Exasperated*) Yes, dear, yes.

George must pick the scene up at this point. Here we have plot. His intensity will vitalize the scene again.

She means it. This speech epitomizes Elizabeth. She is really terribly pleased with a compliment from the man she is thinking of divorcing.

All wide-open eyes, Elizabeth—all eyes!

PHILIP

But that's——

(He catches ELIZABETH'S eye on him and stops. He turns to GEORGE)

Well, I hope you won't mind sharing a bath with me, too.

(He goes out)

ELIZABETH

Now, what does he mean by that?

GEORGE

(Coming quickly toward her. He is deeply concerned)
Elizabeth, that chap said—he said just now he *loved* you!

ELIZABETH

Did he? Now that was very sweet of Philip. *(She smiles happily)*

GEORGE

Well, I—well, look here—I couldn't very well discuss you and me with a stranger, could I?

ELIZABETH

Oh, but Philip isn't a stranger!

GEORGE

Just *who is Philip?*

ELIZABETH

Why, *didn't he tell you?*

GEORGE

No, said he was a relative, by marriage, I think, he said, but then he spoke in sort of an odd fashion. Who is he?

Phil starts to speak off stage. He swings in on the flood of it. He goes down left of low table—for two reasons; first, because he mustn't crowd the other two, and second, because George is going to need the chair left center in a moment.

Elizabeth's speech is not really interrupted; it merely expires into thin air, accompanied by a futile gesture.

Phil takes his time—and a pause before "No."

George can contribute to the scene by looking back and forth at each speaker in turn. When he speaks it should be in a definitely lower key than they have been using.

Here's a good point for Phil to take a cigarette. He can do so without moving (the box is on the table in front of him), and it will occupy him during the next few speeches. He should time it so that he is just waving out the match when he makes his next speech. The cigarette will help contribute an air of ease in contrast to George's confusion.

ELIZABETH

(*Fluttering*) Why, George, he's—he's—
(PHILIP enters noisily)

PHILIP

Say! What have you been doing to that room? Where'd you get those curtains, and what's the idea of taking my best—

ELIZABETH

Philip, dear, I—George has been asking me about—oh, didn't you tell him that you were—we were—

PHILIP

(*Quite simply*) Married? No.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Phil! But, of course, I thought—

PHILIP

Well, if you didn't get around to it in three days, why should you expect me to bring the matter up in fifteen minutes?

GEORGE

(*Finding his voice*) I beg your pardon, but did I understand you to say that you were married?

PHILIP

(*Pleasantly*) You *should* have, but I wouldn't gamble on it.

GEORGE

But, Elizabeth, why didn't you tell me?

Phil can give the effect of mock-ally of George's by saying the last four words of this speech in a lower semi-confidential pitch. It's worth doing for the sake of variety alone.

Properly done, the business of pouring the highballs should hold. The men can Alphonse-and-Gaston it a little. Elizabeth is first on one foot and then on the other. Her face registers the men's emotions. When George turns and takes a long swallow Elizabeth swallows with him. (You've seen a mother feeding a baby with a spoon and doing half the work of ingestion.) Her "There" is really said on behalf of George—just as he might have said "Ah" after drinking deep. She sits down just as they are ready to come back downstage. She watches anxiously as George eases himself into a chair (which he pulls almost direct stage center) and

ELIZABETH

Oh, George, I didn't really think it would matter.

GEORGE

But didn't you think that I was serious?

ELIZABETH

Oh, yes, George.

GEORGE

But how could you take me seriously when you were already married?

PHILIP

George, that's an unintelligent question. Just stop and think for a minute.

GEORGE

I'm afraid I don't understand this at all.

PHILIP

It's really very simple, George, old fellow. Here, have another spot, it'll help you think.

GEORGE

Thanks, I believe I could use a dash.

(They help themselves to highballs. ELIZABETH relaxes into an armchair R.)

ELIZABETH

There, that's better. I do think a little whisky helps, don't you? Sit down, George.

(GEORGE sits L. of C.)

PHILIP

(Going down L.) Make yourself comfortable. If you want to sing, go right ahead.

springs right up when she thinks of the pillow. She should carry the pillow by the top two corners in front of her, almost as though she were displaying it for sale.

The pause is as long as you dare. George looks silly and uncomfortable, Elizabeth emptily pleased, and Phil frankly amused.

If Philip turns his chair so that he is facing three quarters upstage and speaking somewhat over his left shoulder, it will make a better picture and relieve the tedium of seeing the one-two-three formation that is more or less inevitable.

You will note that the positions have not been shifted about in relation to one another in this scene. That is because George must remain the central figure, and a pronounced Virginia reel by Elizabeth and Philip would be awkward.

ELIZABETH

(Reproachfully) Philip!

(She gets a pillow and adjusts it to GEORGE's back. He looks very uncomfortable. She goes back and arranges herself in her seat. PHILIP also sits leisurely L.)

Now! *(She beams upon them)* That's much better, isn't it?

(There is a definite pause)

GEORGE

(Finally) What's much better?

ELIZABETH

(Somewhat shocked at being asked) Why, I mean. we're more comfortable.

GEORGE

(Flatly) I'm not.

PHILIP

(Enjoying himself) Now, George, don't be unreasonable. You see why you're here, of course?

GEORGE

I thought I did, until I came—if you get what I mean.

PHILIP

Not very well put, but I think I follow you. You'll have to do better, though, George, when the discussion becomes more involved.

Don't let Elizabeth get comfortable. After her first setting an example for George she comes up on the edge of her chair. She is nervously prepared for a "scene" and is a little impatient with Phil's attitude.

Phil can swing his chair around on this as an indication that he's back in the game.

The more motionless George is the better.

ELIZABETH

Now, Philip, don't be difficult. It was perfectly plain what George meant; he meant he was just surprised, that's all.

GEORGE

"Surprised" is hardly the word.

PHILIP

No, George, you're right. Shall we say "astounded" or shall we say "shocked"? Maintain this nice sense of word values, it's sure to help.

GEORGE

Wasn't I expected?

PHILIP

(*With a glance at ELIZABETH*) *That's* putting it mildly.

ELIZABETH

Yes, of course you were. Now that's clear enough, Philip. Get on.

PHILIP

(*Feigning surprise*) Is it my turn?

ELIZABETH

Of course it's your turn.

PHILIP

Well, let me see: Animal, vegetable, or mineral?

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

ELIZABETH

Philip, stop fooling. This is serious. Isn't it, George?

Philip now adopts an indulgent father attitude toward George, explaining things to him and humoring him. Be careful he doesn't use his hands too much. Some actors repeat the same motion constantly. The occasional gesture is fine, but its regular repetition is monotonous and becomes meaningless.

Elizabeth must be dead serious. She may, however, indulge in a comforting smile with the second half of her speech.

GEORGE

(With feeling) YES.

PHILIP

Well, my dear, when all's said and done, isn't it up to you? You have us both here now. What are you going to do with us? Make up your mind.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

ELIZABETH

I mean yes—that's just what I'm going to do—make up my mind.

PHILIP

You see, it's such a nice opportunity for her, George. We're both right here together.

GEORGE

Quite.

PHILIP

None of this business of rushing up to Marblehead, trying to think about me, and then flying back down here before she forgets what you're like.

GEORGE

Oh, I say!

ELIZABETH

Philip's exaggerating, George. I remembered you perfectly.

Philip gets up to get himself a drink. He delays a speech or two before going up.

Philip makes most of this speech with his eyes on Elizabeth. The last sentence is an abrupt change of thought and is addressed directly to George.

PHILIP

But you *do* see that it's simpler now, George, don't you?

GEORGE

It doesn't seem simple to me. I came down here expecting to find Elizabeth free to marry me, and to find out if she would.

PHILIP

(*Rising*) Well, that's all right. It's the last half that's important, isn't it? Find out. I'm curious myself.

GEORGE

But, hang it all, she can't, if she's married already.

PHILIP

Nonsense! *I* can be easily arranged. I never would think of standing in the way of Elizabeth's happiness. We mustn't be old-fashioned. She'll just have to make up her mind. I take it you're still willing to play?

GEORGE

Play?

PHILIP

I mean you'll be "it" if she chooses you?

ELIZABETH

Philip, I don't think you're nice at all.

PHILIP

That puts you one up, George. (*He goes up L. to replenish his drink*)

George has been doing a lot of looking out front. It is better if he keeps his eyes down on the footlights. If an actor, lost in lofty thought, must lift the level of his gaze, he will do better to keep it oblique to the audience and not directly center.

When Phil comes back down he is between the table and George. He can even tap him on the shoulder on "eh, George?" On his next speech he can move left a little, but he must take command of the stage during the remainder of this scene until George rises. His pose, and a brisk authoritative voice will help accomplish this.

The play should gather speed from now on. You are really about ready to start playing to the curtain.

ELIZABETH

Philip, you mustn't *try* to make me choose George. I do think though, George, that Phil's right. It's really a wonderful opportunity for me to make up my mind.

PHILIP

(Coming down to his left) And we won't let any other men come in to confuse you. We'll consider the entries closed, eh, George?

GEORGE

You know I'm not sure that I like this idea. It's not done, you know, this sort of thing.

PHILIP

In Marblehead, possibly not, but here it's different; some of us even bathe in the afternoon. Now, don't beg my pardon: that was just a little reminder to Elizabeth of another iniquity of mine. You should be grateful.

ELIZABETH

I don't need reminders. I'm perfectly aware how impossible you can be, at times, Philip.

PHILIP

It is a fact that I am a little better known than you are, George. You'll have to do most of the work. And I think it only fair that you help by throwing out hints about yourself from time to time.

George must turn squarely about in his chair and hold his inquiring look. The focus will then be completely on Philip during the next speech.

Phil must strike an attitude. Perhaps a foot on a chair or even on the table, if it is low enough. When he starts "When I was in Arabia" it should be spoken in an artificial higher register, palpably in quotes. It should also run speedily and continuously for the best comic effect.

George should turn heavily back before making this observation.

Phil makes one definite gesture of despair. Be sure it's broad and unblurred. Half a gesture is worse than none.

He goes back upstage with his glass and remains, back to audience, until George's coming attack on Elizabeth attracts his amused attention.

When George turns he turns his whole body in his chair.

GEORGE

Just what do you mean?

PHILIP

Oh! Reminisce freely, giving us a slant on your experiences, habits, tastes and such like. Can't you see how helpful it would be?

"When I was in Arabia with Gladys Mayfair, whom I was keeping at the time, Lady Cholmondeley asked me to open the Episcopal Church Fair, but I excused myself, being a Baptist, and played polo instead, having an excellent string of ponies, maintained out of the large inheritance received from my uncle, a millionaire senator from the Hawaiian Islands."

You see? Now, that would give us a very fair start.

GEORGE

(Deliberately) I don't play polo.

PHILIP

(Giving up, to ELIZABETH) Your turn, dear. *(He sets down glass)*

ELIZABETH

I'm not playing, and I do wish you'd make sense. It's really very difficult for George.

GEORGE

It really is, you know. I've never been in this position before. I'm not enjoying it at all. I don't know exactly what to do. *(He turns abruptly to ELIZABETH)* I say, why didn't you tell me you didn't like to hear men sing?

The pain of the idea of the bathroom door leaves its mark on George's face. He must hold the expression while awaiting Elizabeth's reply.

Philip has been watching the scene with a broad smile. He has remained upstage to keep out of the picture. Now he comes down on the extreme left as he speaks. When he sits at the end of his speech he faces stage right. This gives George space to come over to the right presently and helps prepare the stage for Sue's imminent entrance.

The worm turns. George's rise must be sudden and a surprise to the audience. He must get to his feet all in one motion. He speaks vehemently. The contrast is surprising.

ELIZABETH

But I *do*. What made you think I didn't?

GEORGE

Oh! And, by the way, if we're really going to be frank about things—that is, if we're trying to find out about one another and all that—I say, do you really leave the bathroom door open?

ELIZABETH

GEORGE!

PHILIP

Come, come, now, George, don't you think we're going too fast? We hadn't exactly reached toilettries.

GEORGE

I beg your pardon?

PHILIP

I knew you would. But see here, George, relax. We've got a nice week-end for us all to straighten out each other's minds, and I want you to be perfectly comfortable about it. Don't feel at a disadvantage, we're very broad-minded—I'm delighted to have you here. Be as attractive as you like. (*He sits L.*)

GEORGE

(*Rising*) Now, look here. This is all very well for you, but I'm not going to sit by and feel like a fool. The discovery that Elizabeth is married has been a real shock to me. I've got to sort out my ideas. Perhaps I have been precipitate. I think the best thing for me to do is return home at once. I don't at all like the idea of making ad-

Philip rises in reply to George's speech, not Sue's entrance. He is about to reply when Sue speaks.

Sue speaks quietly and smilingly. She stays upstage for the moment, commanding the scene. She must be perfectly at ease—again it's contrast you seek.

Elizabeth, when she rises, gives way to the right so that she will not mask Sue and can turn to her left to look at her. She then will not have to turn her back on the others.

If George breathes in when he says "I—er" he'll have plenty of breath to exhale fervently with his "yes."

Be careful that she doesn't saunter down to George. It must be a deliberate, definite, crisp cross. Her very nearness adds to George's embarrassment. It is their scene. They are both a shade above Elizabeth and Philip, who are down in the extreme corners of the stage.

vances to another man's wife. Even though the other man is you.

(PHILIP rises as SUE, who has heard the end of GEORGE'S speech, enters from R.)

SUE

Beautifully put. You don't mind if I compliment you, do you, Mr. Gravicombe? I've heard a very great deal about you. You look very nice and red. And you're even larger than your picture, aren't you? I believe I like you even before you sing.

(ELIZABETH rises at SUE'S entrance. GEORGE turns about angrily, but as he looks at SUE the expression fades and, for the first time since his entrance, he smiles and takes a deep breath of pleasure. He says nothing but continues to gaze at SUE)

ELIZABETH

(After a brief pause during which she has watched his reactions with some dismay) This is Sue Palmer, George. You've heard me speak of her. She has the next house, the one on the North, or is that the South?—I never can remember.

GEORGE

(Finally finding voice—fervently) I'm awfully glad to meet you. I—er—yes—— *(The last word is simply a release of breath)*

SUE

(Crossing to GEORGE) I feel as if I knew you very well already but not half well enough.

Elizabeth takes a step toward her. If Elizabeth doesn't get fairly close to Sue now, the mass movement when George goes over to Phil and Sue comes back to Elizabeth will look too military. Unless there is an explosion or dinner is announced, it is bad to have everybody on the stage move at the same time in a sort of "musical chairs" fashion.

George definitely sidles. It is in character for him to do so, and besides, he's being practically pushed. Philip goes up-stage and stands against the left wall above George.

Sue, after giving George a push, retires to line up beside Elizabeth, and below her. They are below the men, so that the focus is on the latter.

One of the reasons Philip is above George is so that he can answer the telephone without having to cross him. When he does go up to the right of center, George half follows so that he is just below the door left. He is then conveniently placed for his exit at the curtain.

GEORGE

Oh, now, really, that's awfully good of you! I—er—yes—— (*As before*)

SUE

I hope you're staying awhile.

GEORGE

Why—I—well—over the week-end. (*He looks almost defiantly at PHIL as he takes the plunge*)

PHILIP

(*To SUE*) He has the Blue Room!

SUE

(*Not understanding*) Oh, that's nice. (*She turns inquiringly to ELIZABETH*)

ELIZABETH

The corner one, dear. Phil and I call it the Blue Room. (*She gives PHIL a quick glance*)

PHILIP

Yes, I just did; didn't you hear me?

SUE

George, just stand there a minute, will you? Over there by Philip, that's right.

(*GEORGE shifts over to the L. PHILIP lines up with him smiling. She surveys them critically*)

You're right, Elizabeth, it is sort of hard to choose, isn't it?

GEORGE

Oh, I say——!

Be sure that Philip doesn't pick up the phone until the stage hand has stopped ringing the bell. The phone that keeps on ringing after it's answered is disastrous.

George stands very stiffly. His eyes wide open. He swallows before replying. Don't let him conceal this fact from the audience. A duck of the chin will help indicate it.

Philip is at the mantel. All three of course face George. He is the focal point straight through to the curtain.

ELIZABETH

George is handsomer.

SUE

Do you think so?

GEORGE

Oh, now look here—I——

ELIZABETH

Philip has more of an air about him.

GEORGE

Really, I feel like a fool—I——

PHILIP

(Sotto voce) Sh! Wait till they ask us to sing.

(The telephone bell rings)

PHILIP

(Going up R.) I'll answer it. . . . Hello! . . . Yes. Who? Oh, yes! . . . Telegram for you, George. . . . Yes, I'll take it. Go ahead. . . . "Don't be a fool" . . . Right . . . "Please come back. Love." . . . What was that last name? Oh, "Laura"—"Love Laura." Right. Thank you very much. *(He turns to GEORGE)*
Did you get that, George?

GEORGE

(He has changed from surprise to horror and can hardly find voice) Yes.

ELIZABETH

(Sweetly) Who is Laura?

Now the tempo is distinctly faster. All definitely play to the curtain.

Elizabeth takes a step forward to a position in front of the chair into which she is about to sink.

GEORGE

She's—she's a Marblehead girl.

ELIZABETH

How nice!

PHILIP

Do you think it's polite to ask?

ELIZABETH

(*Sharply*) Ask what?

PHILIP

How nice? But since you keep the subject open, I do hope she *is* nice, George.

GEORGE

Oh, but she's not nice a bit. That is, she's too nice—oh, dear—I don't think I'd better stay. Good-bye, Elizabeth, I——

ELIZABETH

But, George——

GEORGE

No—really—you see——

SUE

Are you going back to—ah—“love Laura”?

GEORGE

(*Miserably*) I suppose I really should.

ELIZABETH

You really *should*?

SUE

Should, George?

On "my wife" there must be a definite movement from everybody. Elizabeth's is obvious—she sinks into her chair. Sue is frankly incredulous. She takes a startled step forward—to just above and to the right of Elizabeth. Phil simply whirls about on George—he has turned toward Elizabeth on her speech.

Elizabeth must be distinct and intense with this. She turns her whole body and almost leans toward him. Everyone holds it for the tag.

A slight pause after "could be." The subsequent action must be swift and simultaneous. Philip's must be very rapid. It would be as well to have a small glass with the whisky previously prepared so that he can fake pouring it in one swift motion.

It must be a quick curtain, the cue for which is Philip's turn with the whisky.

GEORGE

(*Desperately*) Yes—I—you see—well, Laura was, that is—she still is—well—my wife.

SUE

What!

ELIZABETH

Oh! (*She sinks into a chair, R.*)

PHILIP

Oh—George! That's tough! Just as you were doing so nicely, too!

ELIZABETH

But, George——

GEORGE

I know—I'm sorry—but you——

ELIZABETH

Oh, but, George—I didn't think you *could* be married!

GEORGE

(*Stung. And bewildered*) Well if you didn't think I *could* be—just what did you have in mind?

(*GEORGE slumps disconsolately out L. for his suitcase, ELIZABETH collapses. SUE tries to stifle her laughter, and PHILIP, pouring a little whisky neat into a tumbler, with a smile that has in it more tenderness than malice, starts down toward ELIZABETH as the curtain falls.*)

NOTE ON THE APPENDICES

Appendices A and B have proved valuable in the regular work of one of the oldest amateur dramatic organizations in the country.

The first of them might well be posted on the call-board of every little-theater group in the United States. It is a pleasant way of saying some very important things.

The second, the monograph addressed to the production manager, is predicated upon a highly systematized organization. A few sections of purely local application have been omitted. Liberally speaking, however, the subject matter may serve as a general pattern for any dramatic association to make use of in part or as a whole. In any case, it affords an excellent check list for the individual who has the responsibility for a club production.

Appendix A

BEHAVIORISM OF YE ACTOR

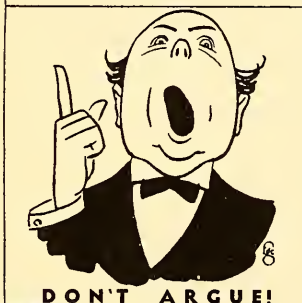
(Grateful acknowledgment is hereby made to the compilers of this invaluable document—Messrs. Henry C. Smith, Christopher La Farge, and Philip Kobbe.)



(1)

You, Mr. Actor, are cast for a part in the Amateur Comedy Club. You first write down all the dates of rehearsals and what TIME they start and then see that you arrive early enough to remove your hat and coat, get rid of rubbers and miscellaneous gossip, and be ready to rehearse at the appointed time. Being on TIME is courteous.

(2)



You take direction from the Director ONLY.

You take all other information from the Production Manager.

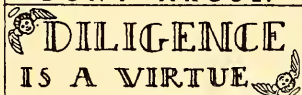
DON'T ARGUE!

If a coach sees that what he gave you was wrong, he will gladly change it all by himself.

Watch others being rehearsed and you will learn much.

Be ready for your entrance cues. If you like entertaining girls with parlor tricks, do it in a parlor.

(3)



Always be on the job. If some actor in a large part suddenly drops out, you will probably be given the part. Diligence is a virtue and virtue is always rewarded.

(4)



Take nice care of your sides. Hand them in to the Production Manager when you are finished.

(5)



Find where you are to get your **COSTUME**.

Go early. Tell the Production Manager what your rig is going to cost. **TAKE CARE OF IT**—it is worth money.

6



Get a hanger and brush if necessary. Keep the box the costume came in. Keep the string. Have it in your dressing room so that when the play is finished you can pack the costume properly and return it to the costumer or place it with other costumes to be sent to the Club House.

7



Treat your wigs with respect. Unless you enjoy paying for lost wigs, find out to whom to return yours, or return it to the wig maker. If you are going to make yourself up, see that the Club House make-up box contains what you need. If it doesn't, speak to the Production Manager and tell him what you want. Unless invited to do so, do not use other people's make-up. They may consider it sacred like their tooth brush.

8



You are responsible for all properties which you CARRY on stage. If you buy any props, give the receipt to the Production Manager, so that he can repay you. **DON'T WAIT UNTIL WEEKS AFTER THE SHOW IS OVER TO TRY TO COLLECT MONEY.**

9



Keep a list of props used in each act and fasten it to your make-up mirror. Look at it each and every time before you go on stage.

If you carry a prop OFF STAGE, give it back promptly to "props" before you go to your dressing room.

10

DRESSING ROOMS



Bring soap, towels and a drinking glass if you are naturally thirsty. **DON'T BORROW.** (Particularly without permission.) The borrowee may have urgent need for that which you have filched.

11



On the first performance night, look at the posted list for dressing room assignment. Every night, when leaving, throw all truck into the hall. Leave your dressing room clean. Cover up your make-up. Act as a gentleman should when he is visiting.



1936



don't be temperamental!

100%

do you
know  your
onions
?



X X X

12

Be in the theatre on time. Do not interfere with the make-up time of others. The Club curtain has rung up on time for over fifty years. See that you become a part of this record.

13

Behave off stage as you would have others behave when you are on.

BE QUIET.

Try to help the show—keep out of the stage hands' way.

Don't touch *anything* in the Prop Room.

Don't eat property sandwiches.

Don't bring strangers back stage.

Don't upset other actors with free advice.

Don't tell them the scenery is lousy; let them guess it.

Don't grouse until the show is over.

Don't be temperamental. You are neither Mansfield nor Bernhardt. Plays are supposed to be given at least for the pleasure of the players.

14

Don't go out front in costume. There are better ways of retaining your amateur standing.

15

Wash your hands before you go on.

Don't lose your things.

Don't make others wait on you.

Don't eat onions, chew spearmint, or drink c2H5OH, so that it is unpleasant to act opposite you.

Flowers are not passed over the footlights.

16

Don't smoke on the stage level; smoke is visible to the audience. Smoking is dangerous. In the alley if you must smoke.

Report each night to the Stage Manager, as soon as you reach the theatre.

17

Each night, when leaving, kiss the prompter goodnight.

Appendix B

DUTIES OF THE PRODUCTION MANAGER

(The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the Amateur Comedy Club, Inc., of New York, for permission to reproduce this memorandum)

After the Play Committee have selected a play, cast it and obtained the services of a director, they will turn the whole production over to you. From this time on you are entirely responsible for getting the show into the theater in proper condition to be produced. Should you require assistance on any major decisions to be made, you should and must consult with the chairman of the Play Committee.

GENERAL

You will appoint a stage manager, an electrician, a property man and a prompter. It is up to the stage manager to appoint any assistant stage managers, stage hands and carpenters that he may need at the theater. The heads of the various departments backstage are responsible, under you, for obtaining their own assistants. They must, however, always notify you so that you will be fully informed as to the crew.

You will receive from the Play Committee a budget of the play. Be sure that each item in this budget has a number and that copies of it are supplied to the treasurer, treasurer's assistant, assistant to the secretary at the clubhouse and the chairman of the Play Committee. The numbering of the

items is important in that it simplifies charging the items of expense to their proper classification. At the end of the production, when all bills have been received and properly posted to the budget, you should submit a report as to the financial outcome of the production with all the items completely filled in and the total saving or loss on the budget noted.

REHEARSALS

In conjunction with the director, you should immediately prepare a list of rehearsals and transmit same to the assistant secretary at the clubhouse so that she may prepare sufficient copies to give to each member of the cast one, and to post a copy on the bulletin board. Check over carefully with the director and with the actors the dates listed so that you will be advised in advance of any nights on which it will be impossible for someone to be present. At the rehearsals, check the attendance every night, noting on the record whether the person is absent or late. If an actor is chronically late, be sure to check him or her, as it may mean delaying the starting of rehearsals and keeping the whole cast later than it should be. If possible, arrange to have all rehearsals stop at eleven o'clock. You will find some directors have little or no sense of time, and are perfectly willing to rehearse until morning. It is your business to watch the clock for him. Be sure that rehearsals start promptly and are carried on in a business-like manner. Nothing is more conducive to the slackness of a production than a haphazard method of carrying on rehearsals. It is advisable for you to be at every rehearsal. If you do not find this convenient, be sure that somebody else is definitely appointed to take charge of the rehearsal on the evenings you are absent. You are the liaison between the director and the cast, and it is important

that you are available to him at all times to receive instructions or to iron out difficulties. Should it seem necessary to discharge an actor from the cast or to rearrange the cast in any way, it is your job to do this. Should changes have to be made, the Play Committee will always be glad to advise with you, but the actual unpleasantness is up to you. Changes of cast may be due to miscasting, in which case it is much better to dismiss the actor and cast someone else. A miscast actor is not happy in his part and is usually a detriment to a production. Sometimes actors drop out for reasons of health, or they have to leave because of business. To replace such casualties, if you cannot do it yourself, ask the aid of the Play Committee.

THE THEATER

Be sure to check with the theater and notify them as to the time and date of arrival and as to what conditions you will require when you get there. Be sure that the necessary pipes are cleared for your use, that the curtain is rigged as knife, tableau or draw curtain, as the production may require. Find out whether a show follows immediately so as to time the break. If there is no show following, it is sometimes possible to make the break on the Sunday after our production.

DIRECTOR

The director will have been selected by the Play Committee; make it your business to get acquainted with him as soon as possible. Be sure to notify the treasurer in advance, in writing, to make payment of the director's fee on the day of the public dress rehearsal.

ROYALTY

The amount of royalty will have been obtained by the Play Committee. If they have not done so, be sure that they get this information. It is up to you to see that the royalty payment is made before the public dress rehearsal.

SET

There may be a scene designer responsible for the selection and design of the set. The director will naturally wish to be consulted. It is your business to see that the designer and the director work properly together and that the set is made and delivered at the specified time. You should follow closely all details and watch the expense carefully. You should also make sure that the necessary arrangements for trucking the set to and from the theater are made.

FLOOR CLOTH

Check with the theater to find out if they have a floor cloth available and, if so, what rental they will charge for it. If they haven't one available, one can usually be rented. Make sure the necessary arrangements are made for transportation to and from the theater.

OVERTIME

A certain amount of overtime is unavoidable, but it is up to you to watch and see that people do not hang around the theater later than is necessary, because overtime is charged until the last member of the cast or crew is out of the theater. This overtime can very easily amount to a substantial sum.

FURNITURE

Consult with the scene designer and the director as to furniture requirements, both as to period and the number of pieces. Be sure that selection is made promptly, and it is important to check just before delivery to the theater to make sure that everything is as selected. Arrange for the necessary transportation.

PROPERTIES

Obtain from the director a list of properties essential to the action and any others that may be required for decoration or atmospheric effect. Find out what off-stage noises or effects are required. Give this list to the property man as promptly as possible, and follow up with him to make sure that all properties are obtained.

LIGHTS

The general lighting for the set will be laid out by the scene designer in consultation with the director. Be sure that the electrician gets a light-plot as soon as possible, and consult with him as to the rental, or purchase of any equipment that may be needed to augment the club's equipment. At the theater, during the rehearsal period, the director is solely responsible for the lighting and will work with the electrician. It is your business to see that nobody else interferes.

MAKE-UP AND WIGS

Appoint a member of the club to be responsible for checking the make-up and packing it for shipment to the theater.

This man should also be authorized to purchase any make-up that may be required. Should any wigs, mustaches or beards be required, be sure that the actor for whom these hirsute adornments are intended goes for the necessary fittings in plenty of time.

COSTUMES

Should any costumes have to be rented, check with the costumer, giving him a list of the costumes required by the scene designer and the name of the person for whom each costume is intended. Be sure that the actors and actresses go to the costumer well in advance of the play. If the costuming is modern dress, be sure and check with the ladies in the cast as to the color of their dresses so that they will not conflict with the scene designer's color scheme. Find out if any of the ladies are obtaining the loan of clothing from any shop, so that proper acknowledgment may be made in the program.

INSURANCE

Arrange with the insurance brokers for coverage on the production. This coverage is against fire, damage due to sprinklers and theft. We limit the insurance per person to \$300 for ladies and \$150 for men. Be sure to notify the cast of these limits so that they will not bring to the theater anything more valuable. Obtain from the costumer, the builder of the set and the property man a proper valuation on these items so that they can be properly insured. Cover any special items that may be involved with insurance; cover well in transit.

MUSIC

If it is a musical show, the orchestra will usually be supplied by the musical director who has been appointed by the Play Committee. If it is not a musical show, arrange to have someone to play before the first curtain and during the intermissions. It is advisable to consult with the Play Committee as to who shall be obtained to play this music.

PROGRAM

The secretary prepares the program and contracts for its printing. He will require that you provide him with all information on the production at least one week before the play goes to the theater. The information which you will be required to provide will be the name of the play, name of the author, the cast, scenes, names of director, production manager, stage manager, electrician, property man, prompter and grips. You must also supply him with the names of those people who are supplying the set, furniture, costumes, make-up and any other items entering into the production.

The secretary of the club will arrange to have tickets printed. Obtain from him as soon as possible, and at least three weeks in advance of the production, an allotment of tickets to be distributed to the cast and crew. It is usually possible to divide the cast and crew into two or more classifications, depending on the importance of their part in the production. The major classifications are the people who play the leading parts, the director, production manager, stage manager, electrician and property man. The next classification will include, in a small production, all others. In a large production, where there are walk-on parts, a third classification may be used.

COAT CHECKS

The responsibility lies with the secretary to arrange that the coat-room boys are provided with coat checks; their services will be contracted for by the secretary.

It is well to check with the secretary of the club and make sure that he has taken care of all the details pertaining to the front of the house.

CARPENTER

Be sure that the stage manager appoints a member of the club, preferably a member of the Workroom Committee, as carpenter for the show. Make him responsible for having the necessary tools and hardware brought to the theater. Should there be any special items, be sure that he is notified.

You should see that the stage manager attends sufficient rehearsals to be thoroughly conversant with the show, and that he is thoroughly familiar with the scenery. It is his business to run the show after Wednesday night and to see that the scenery is properly put up at the theater under your direction.

Arrange to have someone take care of the cleaning up at the clubhouse after the production, and make sure that the club property is properly stored and carefully put away. The properties should be returned to their respective property boxes, and any perishable or fragile property should be carefully wrapped up to prevent soiling. All drapes and curtains should be carefully folded and put away and all scenery restored to its place in the cellar. Make sure that all lighting equipment is checked in and properly stored.

FIRE

Be sure that both you and the stage manager are familiar with the location of fire extinguishers at the theater and that the asbestos curtain is in proper operating condition. Be sure that the knife to release the asbestos curtain is in place and in usable condition. Be sure that the cast and crew are instructed not to smoke on the stage level. This is the stage manager's responsibility, but it is well to notify the cast and crew before they go to the theater and to make sure that the stage manager is instructed in this matter.

PLANS AND SCHEDULES

Obtain a copy of the production manager's booklet and prints of the theater. These prints should be turned over to the scene designer for his information. The production manager's booklet is for your information, to help you check on the various items that must be taken care of.

PAYMENTS

Arrange with the assistant to the secretary to present to you all bills for your approval. Be sure to note on the face of the bill to what item in the budget the expense is to be charged. It is well to have her keep a master sheet of items of the budget which will involve more than one bill. Be sure that all bills sent through have been noted on the master sheet, so that when the final budget is made up, all items of expense are sure to be included. Some items are not billed. It is up to the production manager to authorize the treasurer by letter to make payment in these cases. Some of these items have been noted above, as, for instance, the

director and the royalty. You may find that there will be other items similar to these. Be sure that, where possible, expenditures are covered by sales slips or other papers that may be approved. Obtain from the property man and scene designer a list of their expenditures so that these items may be properly entered on the budget and payment made. It is important to complete the budget as soon after the play as possible. Copies of the completed budget, showing estimate and expenditures, should be sent to the treasurer, the president of the club and the chairman of the Play Committee, and one copy should be placed in the file of the production.

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